

MERSEY GATEWAY EXECUTIVE BOARD

At a meeting of the Mersey Gateway Executive Board on Thursday, 24 January 2008 in the Marketing Suite, Municipal Building

Present: Councillors Polhill (Chairman) and Wharton

Apologies for Absence: Councillor McDermott

Absence declared on Council business: None

Officers present: B. Dodd, D. Parr, M. Reaney, D. Tregea, S. Nicholson, M. Noone and C. Halpin

ITEMS DEALT WITH UNDER DUTIES EXERCISABLE BY THE BOARD

Action

MGEB11 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 15th November 2007, having been printed and circulated, were taken as read and signed as a correct record.

MGEB12 MAKING A PLANNING APPLICATION AND SUBMITTING THE DRAFT ORDERS FOR MERSEY GATEWAY

The Board received a report of the Strategic Director – Environment, which informed Members of the proposed programme for making planning and other applications and submitting draft Orders for Mersey Gateway (MG). These were needed to secure the powers required to construct and maintain the new crossing, to charge tolls, and to acquire all the land needed to construct, mitigate, maintain and operate the system. It was noted that the proposed applications did not include adjustment to the approach roads to the Silver Jubilee Bridge (SJB) in Runcorn. This was because the form of the de-linking proposals in this area was to be subject to further consultation as part of the consideration of alternative regeneration schemes for Runcorn Old Town.

It was noted that the proposed scheme to be covered in the Applications was the culmination of extensive options appraisals undertaken over many years. The development of the proposed scheme had been informed by public

consultation at each key stage in the preparation process, concluding with the Pre-Planning Application Public Consultation, which reported last November. The scheme also benefited from extensive engineering and environmental studies and assessments, which would be published in the Environmental Statement and associated documents to support the Applications.

The Board was aware that the most appropriate statutory process to apply for the MG project had been discussed at length with Department for Transport (DfT) officials since the scheme received Programme Entry approval in March 2006. In November last year, we reached a consensus with the Department on the statutory process that should be used to secure the powers and to deliver the project. The preferred statutory process was unavoidably complex and embraced several separate applications and draft Orders. The main components in the application programme were outlined within the report along with the target programme for Council resolutions.

It was noted that completing the Environmental Statement and securing the agreement of the DfT to commence the statutory planning process were both critical to achieving the target programme. The Environmental Statement (and supporting documents) was on target to be completed in time for a March publication. The project team was engaged with DfT officials on matters they had yet to endorse. It was expected that further progress would be made on the outstanding issues at the next progress meeting on 18th January 2008 and resolved before March 2008.

The main issues that would be reassessed by the DfT were value for money and the level of confidence that the project could be delivered within the funding limits agreed when Ministers granted Programme Entry status for the project. It was noted that robust evidence to support a favourable outcome for both these issues was currently being submitted to DfT for consideration.

The Board was advised that the Land required for the scheme had been identified, and land owners had been invited to discuss the programme for acquiring their land interest, in line with the policy for land acquisition agreed by the Mersey Gateway Executive Board. The impact of the proposed scheme on Council owned land, other than that dedicated as highway, was relatively small. The toll plaza along Speke Road would however require the existing road to be widened, mainly extending the highway boundary to

the south encroaching into the area of the closed golf course. It was proposed that the golf course would be reinstated in a modified form. The opportunity to reinstate the golf course was constrained by the land required for the toll plaza, and the land lost could be further exacerbated by drainage lagoons that may be required for flood attenuation. A study would be taking place to produce a revised course that would not be affected by the scheme, combined with the potential use of additional land in Council ownership that adjoined the golf course to the north. The results of the study into the opportunity to reinstate the golf course would inform the final design of the Mersey Gateway (MG) scheme in this area.

It was further advised that the funding required to promote the scheme through the statutory process was covered by the approved MG development budget. The profile of expenditure this year was higher than forecast. The DfT had recently changed its position and invited the Council to bid for a contribution towards development costs, in view of the exceptional financial challenge facing the Borough in promoting such a large project that had regional significance. The Council was requested to submit a bid for development costs at the earliest opportunity and the substance of such a bid would be discussed with DfT officials at the progress meeting on 18th January 2008.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the programme for submitting the proposed Applications to the Executive Board, and where required to the Full Council, be agreed;
- (2) the application process commence at the earliest opportunity by preparing and making a Planning Application or Applications and a Listed Buildings Application for the MG scheme subject to receiving the necessary clearance from the Department for Transport; and
- (3) the Chief Executive be authorised to agree the form and content of the draft application, including its geographical scope.

Strategic Director
- Environment

Chief Executive

MGEB13MERSEY GATEWAY SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORT OPPORTUNITIES

The Board received a report of the Strategic Director – Environment, which informed Members that the scope of the Mersey Gateway (MG) Project to be taken forward

through the statutory planning process would identify considerable opportunity to establish improved sustainable transport across the Borough. To take advantage of the opportunities arising from MG, a study would be undertaken that would explore sustainable transport policies and potential interventions that would improve the travel choices available for cross river trips.

It was noted that the MG project had objectives that were intended to deliver improved and sustainable transport across the Borough. The key objectives were outlined in detail in the report.

Furthermore the current Local Transport Plan (LTP2) was drafted with some uncertainty over the likelihood that MG would be supported by Government. The confirmed funding support associated with the Programme Entry decision in March 2006 presented a step change in the prospects for delivering MG. Transport policy could now be refined to ensure the maximum potential benefit from MG was delivered across the total transport system in the Borough. The first deliverable towards this aim was to produce a draft MG Sustainable Transport Strategy. The document would need to be robust to support MG through the formal planning process that was about to commence.

The Board was advised that the development of a MG Sustainable Transport Strategy would be informed by the scheme assessment results. Introducing the new crossing and charging tolls would have a massive impact on travel patterns and behaviour. Policies and interventions would need to be developed and reinforce change where required, by improving travel choice and to encourage the move towards more sustainable transport modes. The MG Viable Demand Traffic Model provided a robust basis for a quantitative assessment of policy and intervention options.

In addition it was noted that policy options and draft proposals would be the subject of consultation and engagement with stakeholders in the community. An in-depth consultation exercise was proposed to explore perceptions and opinions of the MG scheme and to provide additional intelligence to support the broader consultation that was undertaken in the summer of 2007. The work would be taken forward in parallel with the policy and strategy review.

The initial study report would set out a draft sustainable transport strategy and action plan beyond 2010/11, and identify how the MG would help tackle

congestion in Halton and enable the sustainable transport strategy to be delivered.

RESOLVED: That the scope of the proposed study that is expected to identify the preferred options for a MG Sustainable Transport Strategy be noted.

MINUTES ISSUED: 30th January 2008

CALL IN: 6th February 2008

Any matter decided by the Mersey Gateway Executive Board may be called in no later than 6th February 2008

Meeting ended at 3.10 p.m.