

REPORT TO: Executive Board

DATE: 22 February 2018

REPORTING OFFICER: Strategic Director, Enterprise, Community and Resources

PORTFOLIO: Transportation and Physical Environment

SUBJECT: Widnes Loops to West Bank Link Road

WARD(S) Riverside

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 To present design options for a new permanent link road between the Mersey Gateway Bridge and West Bank; and, to seek financial approval and other necessary authorisations to progress delivery of the new link road in a timely manner.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That

- 1) Members agree to the development of the recommended Option 5b, as outlined in section 3.7 of the report;**
- 2) Members approve formal engagement of the Mersey Gateway Crossings Board and Merseylink to enable delivery of the Widnes Loops to West Bank Link Road;**
- 3) Members recommend to Full Council a variation to the capital programme to cover the costs as outlined in section 5.1 of the report;**
- 4) the Strategic Director, Enterprise, Community and Resources be authorised, in consultation with the Portfolio Holders for Physical Environment and Transportation, to take the necessary actions to ensure value for money through the appropriate procurement processes; and**
- 5) the Strategic Director, Enterprise, Community and Resources be authorised, in consultation with the Portfolio Holders for Physical Environment and Transportation, to take any other actions necessary to enable timely delivery of the new link road.**

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

3.1 Background

In March 2017, Executive Board approved the Mersey Gateway Regeneration Plan *Plus*. Focussed on eight 'Regeneration Impact Areas', the Plan sets out a cohesive package of development opportunities and identifies the key infrastructure and enabling projects to complement and support growth.

The Plan identifies a new link road between the Mersey Gateway Bridge and West Bank Impact Area as a priority 'connectivity' infrastructure project. The approximate alignment is proposed to be between the new 'Widnes Loops' Bridge Junction and the intersection of Victoria Road, Hutchinson Street and Waterloo Road (see location plan at Appendix A)

3.2 Construction of this new link road will contribute to regeneration and economic development objectives; as well as provide a more resilient and connected transport network. The main anticipated benefits being:

- Improves connectivity for residential and business communities of West Bank and helps tackle its 'sense of isolation';
- 'Open up' development opportunities and visitor potential of West Bank Impact Area, including approximately 10 hectares (24 acres) of residual project 'hand back' land;
- Provides improved strategic road access to Viking Park logistics hub (3MG East), avoiding height restrictions to the Railway Bridge on Victoria Road; and
- Helps alleviate future pressure on Ditton Junction.

3.3 Whilst not delivered as part of the Mersey Gateway Project, the formal Project Agreement provides safeguards which allows for future provision of a West Bank Link by the Council, including:

- Future addition of up to 2 junctions, with a minimum link length of 50m between the channel of Waterloo/Victoria Road and the stop lines/give way at the Widnes Loops Junction; and
- Future additional signalisation on the circulatory road / roundabout, junctions and sliproad.

In allowing for a West Bank link and associated traffic signals to Widnes Loops, the Project Agreement also provides criteria, such as journey and queuing times, which the design of the new link must meet.

3.4 It was clear from preliminary discussions with the Mersey Gateway Crossing Board (MGCB) that in addition to the standard traffic modelling of the effect of the new link on wider road network traffic

flows, a specific and specialist assessment of impact on traffic flows on the Mersey Gateway Bridge route would be required. Any design solution (and approach to construction) would have to demonstrate to Merseylink and the MGCB acceptable impact upon the Mersey Gateway Project route and journey times, before delivery could be progressed.

3.5 **Feasibility Study Summary**

In August 2017, a feasibility study was commissioned to undertake the necessary initial design, traffic modelling and costing work to enable the Council to make an informed decision on a potential scheme. This included assessing impact of the new link design options on:

- Mersey Gateway Bridge flows and the journey time targets;
- Wider Highway network, such as need to minimise traffic directed to the Silver Jubilee Bridge;
- Impact on the Silver Jubilee Bridge Sustainable Transport Corridor, a proposed high quality walking and cycling route connecting Runcorn and Widnes Town centres, which will likely be routed along Waterloo Road and Victoria Road.

The study is therefore also intended as a means to engage with MGCB and Merseylink to enable delivery.

3.6 The initial feasibility study is expected to be finalised in early March 2018. As part of the iterative process of design and modelling a series of options have been considered for the configuration of the new link road and associated junction at the intersection of Victoria Road, Hutchinson Street and Waterloo Road. (These are summarised in Appendix B). Following a technical review process and traffic modelling exercise the following options were rejected:

Options 1 & 2

It was quickly concluded that a one-way link between Widnes Loops and West Bank (in either option direction) would not meet the objectives of local businesses or regeneration aspirations.

Options 3 & 4

Both options allow for a two-way link between Widnes Loops and West Bank. These options cater for an all movements signalised junction to Waterloo Road, Victoria Road and Hutchinson Street. Options were subjected to further detailed junction modelling and both were found to result in significant queuing back to the Widnes Loops Junction which could result in delays to traffic exiting the Mersey Gateway bridge, and would therefore be unacceptable.

3.7 Interim advice, prior to publication of the final study, is that three options remain:

Options 5a & 5b

Similar in design to option 3, but both have right turns banned from the new link and Hutchinson Street to Victoria Road and Waterloo Road respectively. Banning these small numbers of movements improves junction performance and thereby overcomes the queuing issues to Widnes Loops Junction associated with options 3 and 4. These limited vehicular movements would need to take an alternative route.

The difference between 5a and 5b is the pedestrian crossing over the new link is either two or three stages, with three stages resulting in better overall junction performance.

Option 6

Provides an all movement roundabout at the intersection of Waterloo Road, Victoria Road and Hutchinson Street. Whilst the junction performs adequately for traffic, walking and cycling provision is reduced. Adding a signalised pedestrian crossing may result in queues back to the Mersey Gateway and this is being investigated further. This analysis will form part of the final feasibility study.

Of the three remaining options, interim advice recommends option 5b as the preferred option to take forward. This is because option 5b performs best, meeting the broad objectives for the link road and requirements in terms of balancing the needs of vehicle and pedestrian movements. As a strategic entry point into the Borough, the incorporation of an appropriate landscape scheme will be required to complement and extend the quality corridor provided by the Mersey Gateway Project.

- 3.8 With all three shortlisted options it is possible that the current one-way access into Wellington Street (from the intersection of Waterloo Road, Victoria Road and Hutchinson Street) may not be able to be retained. This is due to the safety implications of adding an additional manoeuvre to the new junction. It is possible that Wellington Street would need to become a cul-de-sac with adequate vehicle turning provision made. This would require a Traffic Regulation Order which may require further authorisations which could add delays to delivery of the link road. Whilst the one-way movements into Wellington Street are minimal the preference is that it should be retained if possible. It will only be at detailed design and safety audit stage that a final approach can be determined.

3.9 Next Steps

The proposed programme for delivery of this project is:

Action	When
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In principle approval of MGCB / Merseylink	April - May 2018
Full design, costing, project risk assessment, safety audit and value for money assessment	May 2018 - September 2018
Planning approval / formal MGCB approval	September - November 2018
Procurement of contractor	October - November 2018
Start on site, including utility diversions	December 2018

3.10 This is an ambitious programme that works towards a start on site by the end of 2018; although every effort will be made to secure a more expedient delivery programme. The next step is to formally engage with the MGCB and Merseylink to present the final analysis and recommendations of the feasibility study and agree in principle the acceptability of option 5b (subject to final study report) as a preferred design for the new link road. Discussions would also need to establish any legal implications of construction of the link on the Project Agreement.

3.11 Once this has been agreed, the Council, liaising closely with MGCB, can move to full design of the preferred option. It would be at this point a comprehensive costing would be able to undertaken, and the scheme would move to formal planning and procurement.

4.0 **POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

4.1 Delivery of the Widnes Loops to West Bank link road is in accordance with the Mersey Gateway Regeneration Plan *Plus*. The link road will help maximise the regeneration, economic and transport benefits of the Mersey Gateway Project.

4.2 In April 2017, a temporary link was opened between Widnes Loop and West Bank as part of a diversion to enable construction of the Widnes approach roads. This temporary link was not constructed to an adoptable standard or with any sense of permanency. It was closed upon the opening of the new Bridge, in accordance with the Project Agreement. Ward Councillor feedback is that the residential and business communities of West Bank found this an attractive route that they would like to see reinstated on a permanent basis. Link road delivery will help improve the quality of life for West Bank communities and provide a further opportunity for access and egress.

4.3 As a significant infrastructure investment, the delivery of the project is a statement of the Council's commitment and ambition for West Bank as a regeneration area. It helps build trust and confidence, laying the foundations for the Council to work with the local residents

and businesses and other stakeholders to develop a longer term masterplan and delivery strategy for West Bank. It is also a strong signal to potential investors and developers.

5.0 OTHER/FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 As part of interim advice a preliminary cost estimate has been undertaken. This has been based on measured values from a limited design, based on the 2-dimensional design for Option 5b. Interim advice recommends an initial budget allocation of £1.1m. However, given a number of assumptions and exclusions it is recommended that a re-costing exercise should be undertaken following Detailed Design.

As such, to enable timely delivery of the new link road it is recommended that a variation to the capital programme is sought for £2 Million.

5.2 To enable timely delivery of the new link road, without the need to refer back to Executive Board, it is recommended that the Strategic Director - Enterprise, Community and Resources be authorised, in consultation with the Portfolio Holders for Physical Environment and Transportation, to take any necessary actions including:

- To consider and determine the outcome of the Traffic Regulation Order process;
- Procurement; and
- Minor land acquisitions.

5.3 In terms of return on investment of Council capital expenditure, this scheme will help unlock development and investment within West Bank, including on 'hand back' land, increase the potential development opportunities which in turn lead to greater business rate returns.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

6.1 Children & Young People in Halton

West Bank is home to one primary school, Widnes Academy. This project will help make West Bank a more attractive place to live and to build new homes, helping to support the viability of this provision.

6.2 Employment, Learning & Skills in Halton

This project will help stimulate investment and new job opportunities within the West Bank.

6.3 A Healthy Halton

A key consideration as part of the options design appraisal was the need to encourage walking and cycling along Waterloo Road and Victoria Road and thereby complement proposals for the Silver Jubilee Bridge Sustainable Transport Corridor.

6.4 **A Safer Halton**
Link road delivery will help provide a more resilient transport network and in particular reduce the likelihood of high-sided vehicles striking the low railway bridge over Victoria Road.

6.5 **Halton's Urban Renewal**
Link road delivery forms part of the Mersey Gateway Regeneration Plan *Plus* and has been identified as a priority connectivity project to help secure the regeneration and renewal of West Bank.

7.0 **RISK ANALYSIS**

7.1 As set out in para 3.9, delivery of this scheme requires a number of formal authorisations, including approval of the MGCB, Planning Permission and possibly a Traffic Regulation Order. Consequently, key risks to the programme could be costs over-run and delays in delivery. To mitigate these risks a detailed project plan and risk assessment will be produced prior to the detailed design stage. This will include early engagement with appropriate third parties including MGCB, utility providers and the Local Planning Authorities.

8.0 **EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES**

8.1 There are no immediate Equality and Diversity issues arising from this report

9.0 **REASON(S) FOR DECISION**

Delivery of the Widnes Loops to West Bank link road will help maximise the regeneration, economic and transport benefits of the Mersey Gateway Project.

10.0 **ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED**

The options considered and rejected are outlined in paragraph 3.5 - 3.7 of this report.

11.0 **IMPLEMENTATION DATE**

April 2018

12.0 **LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972**

Document	Place of Inspection	Contact Officer
Mersey Gateway Regeneration Plan <i>Plus</i>	http://runcorn-widnes.com/docs/mgplan.pdf	Wesley Rourke