

REPORT TO: Urban Renewal Policy and Performance Board
DATE: 16th September 2009
REPORTING OFFICER: Strategic Director, Environment
SUBJECT: The Implications of De-linking the Silver Jubilee Bridge – Topic Group Progress Report
WARD(S) Boroughwide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 To report back to the Board on the matters examined by the Topic Group set up to consider the implications of de-linking the Silver Jubilee Bridge in support of the Mersey Gateway Project.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That:

Members of the Policy and Performance Board note the progress made by the Topic Group in examining the issues associated with the proposed de-linking of the Silver Jubilee Bridge and endorse the Group's conclusion that any further consideration be deferred until the outcome of the Public Inquiry into the Mersey Gateway Project is known.

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

3.1 At its meeting of 18 June 2008, the Board agreed the Topic Briefs for the issues it wished to pursue in 2008/09. One of these briefs related to the implications of De-linking the Silver Jubilee Bridge (SJB). This brief is attached as Appendix 1 and it contains among other things a description of the Topic, an explanation of why the Topic was chosen, the Group's Terms of Reference, a list of key outputs and outcomes sought, and the proposed composition of the Group.

3.2 The Board were invited to nominate a small number of Members to comprise the Group and one Member to Chair it. Councillors Morely, Nolan, Thompson, Hodgkinson and Balmer were subsequently nominated with Councillor Morley as Chair. The Lead Officer to support the Group would be the Operational Director – Highways, Transportation and Logistics.

3.3 Since its inception the Group have met on five occasions, the last of which also incorporated a site visit to both the Runcorn and Widnes approaches to the SJB. During the course of these meetings the Group considered the de-linking proposals as contained within:

- The Mersey Gateway (MG) and Silver Jubilee Bridge series of Applications for Orders and Consents including the Transport and Works Act Order – as these particular elements do not cover the de-linking of roads and structures on the Runcorn side of the SJB the discussions of the applications focussed on the Widnes side and the de-linking required to enable the Gateway and its approach needs to be constructed, together with the changes required to the SJB for it to cater for local traffic and sustainable transport modes (buses, pedestrians and cyclists).
- The Mersey Gateway Regeneration Strategy – an outline of the strategy and the Preferred Options for Runcorn and Widnes, including the de-linking proposals contained within them was given. The type, scale and potential costs associated with the various developments proposed in the Strategy were debated as were the range of possible issues surrounding the Preferred Options, especially for Runcorn. The range of issues considered is outlined below. Members were provided with copies of the Regeneration Strategy Options to enable them to consider the potential implications in more detail.
- The Mersey Gateway Sustainable Transport Strategy (MGSTS) – the aims and main proposals of the Strategy were outlined but with a particular emphasis being given to the proposals for the Silver Jubilee Bridge which is to become a Sustainable Transport Corridor once the Mersey Gateway is opened. Members were provided with a copy of the MGSTS. Again, a number of issues were explored and are outlined below.

3.4 The minutes of the five meetings that were held set out in more detail than can be given here, the particular issues that Members felt needed further discussion and/or clarification so that their implications could begin to be assessed. As most are common to all of the documents referred to in 3.3 above it is felt easier to consider these issues according to their location. A summary of these discussions, including where necessary an explanation of where further work or consideration may be necessary, now follows.

3.5 Runcorn side of the SJB

3.5.1 It was emphasised from the outset by officers that the proposals for de-linking on the Runcorn side were nowhere near as advanced as other parts of the MG Project simply because they did not form part of the relevant Applications. Although the published Applications for Mersey Gateway include the modifications to the SJB carriageway, any alteration to the SJB approach roads in Runcorn were not included because the arrangements would be influenced by the Runcorn regeneration strategy that is yet to be finished. It follows that there was, and indeed remains, greater potential to examine the

potential implications of any de-linking options in Runcorn.

- 3.5.2 An enquiry was made as to whether the Weston Expressway off-slip onto the SJB could be closed to allow the Bridgewater Canal to be extended. It was confirmed that, in theory, this was possible but that it would in all probability be extremely expensive and require consent from Peel Holdings. No work has been done to examine the feasibility of extending the canal.
- 3.5.3 There was considerable discussion around the de-linking options for Runcorn and what existing links or capacity should be retained. Indeed, it is fair to say that these discussions were the primary focus of debate for the Group. Whilst the MG Applications do not include for a de-linking layout on this side of the SJB the approved MG Regeneration Strategy does put forward a Preferred Option that has been approved by Executive Board. The information put to the Public Inquiry included the preferred MG Regeneration Strategy in Runcorn where the road capacity of the Runcorn approaches would be amended to respond to the reduced demand for highway capacity.
- 3.5.4 The need for de-linking was questioned by some members of the Group as were the predicted costs and benefits of the Options contained in the MG RS, including the Preferred Option. An alternative option that effectively retained the links onto/off the SJB, with the exclusion of the Town Viaduct, and provided direct access to the rail station was tabled by one Member. It was subsequently concluded that all three options under consideration (2 MG RS Options and the proposed alternative) would accommodate predicted traffic flows and an analysis of the pros and cons of each option was undertaken and subsequently distributed. At the final meeting another Member tabled additional options and requested that these be explored.
- 3.5.5 There was consensus that de-linking on the Runcorn side was a very complex issue that would require more debate and detailed evaluation of all possible options. This would include consideration of, for example: the type and scale of development that could be accommodated, the capacity and operational capabilities of each option, access to public transport and particularly the rail station, the need to cater for emergency situations/incidents on the MG and the need for existing roads or traffic to be retained or removed. Members were reminded that the two draft Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs) for Runcorn and Sothorn Widnes that are due to go out to consultation will give further opportunity to comment on the approved Preferred Options.
- 3.5.6 It was emphasised that there is a need to determine what needs to be funded out of available MG budgets and that this de-linking work needs to be considered not as a highway scheme but as a

development and regeneration initiative that stems from the MG. It was felt by one Member that regardless of which option is agreed, flexibility for Runcorn residents should not be removed.

- 3.5.7 The Members of the Group concluded that the Preferred Options could be supported at this stage but they would prefer to see all options remaining open and that more detailed evaluation of each one should be undertaken once the result by the Public Inquiry was known. It was also recognised that consultation on the two draft SPD's referred to above would present further opportunity to comment on options for regeneration.

3.6 Widnes side of the SJB

- 3.6.1 Concern was expressed about the replacement of the existing Ditton Road roundabout with a series of traffic signal controlled junctions especially in light of the proposed 3MG development and the need to manage traffic flows during the construction of the Gateway. It was confirmed by the MG Team that traffic modelling demonstrates that the signals can cope with anticipated traffic flows and that Traffic Management Plans for Construction Phases would need to be provided by the Contractor and approved by the Council as Highway Authority.
- 3.6.2 There was a concern that if there were an incident on the Gateway that prevented southbound traffic from the A562 Speke Road from using it, the design of the on-slip onto the SJB could not cope with the resultant traffic flows. It was therefore agreed that the design by amended to allow a 2 lane flow onto the SJB in emergency situations but that one lane will be marked for normal purposes.
- 3.6.3 It was confirmed that the Sankey Canal would remain open and that accessibility for pedestrians and cyclists wishing to travel alongside it would be improved.
- 3.6.4 In considering the Regeneration proposals for Southern Widnes, clarification was given that the tolls charged on the MG and SJB would not be used to fund development.
- 3.6.5 The need to demolish the Queensway viaduct that currently crosses the off-slip onto the Widnes Eastern By-pass and creating an at-grade junction was queried because of its potential impact on the safety of cyclists and the costs associated with such proposals. It was emphasised that this is not part of the MG Project but was in the MG RS and hence this and other proposals for the viaduct were still open to further examination. The Supplementary Planning Documents for Southern Widnes (and indeed for Runcorn) will form part of the Core Strategy and hence will go out to public consultation at the appropriate time. This will give Members the opportunity to review and comment on all proposals for regeneration including the

proposed highway network that does not form part of the MG Project Applications.

- 3.6.6 There was consensus that demolition of the viaducts as identified in the Applications or as required for fill could be supported but that consideration could be given to the potential use of other redundant structures (say for cycling/leisure pursuits)

3.7 The Silver Jubilee Bridge

- 3.7.1 The main issue raised here was in relation to the future layout and hence capacity of the SJB. Concern was expressed that the removal of two existing traffic lanes to allow for dedicated walking and cycling routes would impact adversely on the SJB's ability to cope should there be an incident on the MG that would prevent its use in one or both directions. The fear is that the reduced capacity of the SJB could lead to serious traffic congestion on the SJB approaches, and particularly in Runcorn, with the resultant problems of delays, pollution and inconvenience this would cause. It was stated that Runcorn residents are likely to be particularly affected by such situations.
- 3.7.2 It was suggested that in order to avoid these problems on the Runcorn side, the link from the Weston Expressway should be retained, possibly as an emergency link (which would by definition possibly exclude an extension of the Bridgewater Canal) and that the Bridgewater Expressway should not be downgraded but have its current capacity retained. Proposals to remove or downgrade these sections of Expressway could, it was felt, be expensive and hence needed to be evaluated in much more detail. It was suggested that it would be more cost effective to retain and maintain the existing carriageways rather than reconfiguring or removing them.
- 3.7.3 It was further suggested that the existing footway across the SJB should be retained and that question of whether there should be a barrier/guardrail between the new footway/cycleway and the carriageway needed to be explored further. It was explained that the new facilities proposed for the SJB would be wider and hence much more amenable which in turn would make them more attractive to pedestrians and cyclists. It was agreed that the existing footway would remain, as it contains statutory undertaker's services, but that it would be gated.
- 3.7.4 The design philosophy of the MG was explained by the Mersey Gateway Team including how it would be expected to carry 80% of the predicted cross river traffic, leaving SJB to carry 20%. The MG will consist of 2 carriageways of 3 lanes each on 2 structurally independent decks. The whole system would allow for contra-flow working if necessary. It was strongly emphasised that leaving the SJB and its approaches as they are now was not an option as it

could result in more traffic being attracted to it thus impacting on the potential viability and business case for the new bridge which all agreed could not be allowed to happen. There was consensus the appropriate Applications to be considered by the Public Inquiry would be supported but the opportunity to convert the proposed two-lane carriageway across SJB to four lanes in the event of an emergency situation may be worthy of further consideration at the detailed design stage.

3.8 Conclusions

3.8.1 The Members of the Group concluded that the Topic Group meetings had enabled an open and frank discussion on the implications of De-linking the SJB. It was agreed that it made sense to await the outcome of the Public Inquiry before looking to influence proposals in Runcorn. It was concluded that there was no need for the Topic Group to continue in the immediate future, that support continue to be given to the various MG Applications and Orders to be considered by the Public Inquiry, and that support be given for the Preferred Options of the MG RS but that more work be undertaken on these and alternative options once the result of the Inquiry was known. It was further recognised that in order to consider any further evaluation of these options, the Topic Group may need to be reconvened subject to approval of this Policy and Performance Board.

4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

4.1 This report considers issues associated with the potential implications of de-linking the SJB. Whilst there are no policy implications, the Topic Group confirmed its support for the Mersey Gateway Project and the possible need to further evaluate the Options for de-linking outside of the MG suite of Applications for Orders and Consents.

5.0 OTHER IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Whilst the Group have identified the need for possible further evaluation of de-linking options, there are no other implications associated with this report at this stage.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

6.1 Children & Young People

There are no direct implications arising from this report, however, through the promotion of the SJB sustainable transport corridor and associated improvements of the MG STS the Group identified the potential for children and young people to have improved access by public transport to education, employment, social and leisure

opportunities.

6.2 Employment, Learning & Skills in Halton

Outline consideration of the economic benefits of the MG Project together with the potential afforded by the MG RS and the MG STS for the creation of new investment, development, job creation and training opportunities allowed the Group to appreciate the employment, learning and skills opportunities that could accrue from the Project for the Borough, the Liverpool City region and the wider sub-region.

6.3 A Healthy Halton

Although there are no direct implications arising from this report, it was understood that with the MG expected to take 80% of the traffic currently using the SJB, air pollution in the vicinity of the SJB is predicted to improve benefitting those residents living in areas where de-linking may take place. The MG STS was also identified as having the potential to promote public transport, walking and cycling as more sustainable and healthier ways to travel.

6.4 A Safer Halton

There are no direct implications for a Safer Halton arising from this report.

6.5 Halton's Urban Renewal

Whilst there are no direct implications for Halton's Urban Renewal arising from this report, the Group were able to consider the potential regeneration and development opportunities that could be afforded by the Project and the MG RS in particular.

7.0 RISK ANALYSIS

7.1 As the Board is being asked to note the progress of the Topic Group there are no identifiable risks associated with the report.

8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

8.1 Whilst the MG Project and the MG STS aim to improve access for all in the community, there are no direct Equality and Diversity issues attached to this report.

9.0

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

Document	Place of Inspection	Contact Officer
Minutes of the Silver Jubilee Bridge De-Linking Topic Group meetings from 21 st October 2008 to 11th March 2009	Department of Highways, Transportation and Logistics, Rutland House, Runcorn	Mick Noone
Mersey Gateway Applications for Orders and Consents	Mersey Gateway Team, Turnstone Park, Widnes	Matt Fearnhead
Mersey Gateway Regeneration Strategy and draft Supplementary Planning Documents for Runcorn and Southern Widnes	Environmental & Regulatory Services Department, Rutland House, Runcorn	Andrew Pannell
Mersey Gateway Sustainable Transport Strategy	Mersey Gateway Team, Turnstone Park, Widnes	Dave Owen

Urban Renewal Policy and Performance Board

Topic title: The Implications of De-linking the Silver Jubilee Bridge

PPB(s) responsible: Urban Renewal

Officer Lead: Mick Noone Tel: 0151 471 7370

Support Officer: Jonathan Farmer 0151 424 2061 X3018

Planned start/end date: July 2008 Target PPB meeting March 2009

Topic description and scope:

A review of the proposed de-linking (removal) of highways in Runcorn and Widnes that is required to allow the construction of the Mersey Gateway to proceed and to enable the Key Objectives of the scheme to be met. To consider the potential social, environmental and economic impacts of this de-linking and the potential opportunities afforded by it.

Terms of Reference

- To consider the Mersey Gateway Key Objectives as the criteria against which the review of the de-linking should take place.
- To review the extent of the de-linking works, proposed changes to the highway network and the likely implications for movements of traffic including public transport, pedestrians and cyclists.
- To consider the areas of land that could be made available for development subsequent to de-linking in order to maximize opportunities that are currently constrained by the presence of the existing highway infrastructure.
- To review the Mersey Gateway Regeneration Strategy Options as they relate to de-linking.
- To consider the potential impacts on residents and businesses directly or indirectly affected by the de-linking and potential opportunities to improve their environment
- To consider potential improvements to the local highway network and provision for sustainable transport in the context of the above opportunities.
- To safeguard the interests of local communities during the extended Mersey Gateway and SJB de-linking construction/demolition periods.
- To consider the implications of extending the Bridgewater Canal.

Why this topic was chosen:

The Mersey Gateway is a £390m proposal to provide a new crossing of the river Mersey. It will require major changes to existing highway infrastructure, including some of the Borough's more major road structures that will have to be demolished or amended to accommodate the new bridge. It will also reduce traffic flows significantly on the Silver Jubilee Bridge to a point where existing structures and roads will no longer be necessary. These changes will release land for development and provide new opportunities for movement but they will also have a potential impact on local residential and business communities, especially during the construction phases. It is therefore appropriate to consider what the potential impacts of the de-linking are likely to be.

Key outputs and outcomes sought

Outputs:

A clear understanding of –

- The Key Objectives of the Mersey Gateway scheme
- The proposed changes to the highway network that will take place in order to accommodate the Mersey Gateway and realize its objectives
- The potential impacts on local communities associated with construction (and demolition) works
- The potential land that will become available for development as a consequence of the de-linking
- The potential regeneration options available for Widnes and Runcorn Old town as set out in the Mersey Gateway Regeneration Strategy
- The Mersey Gateway Sustainable Transport Strategy and its links with the de-linking; together with
- Some recommendations on how local community interests should be protected, how accessibility to services and facilities can be maximized and on how development should proceed in areas affected by de-linking.

Outcomes:

The identification of any significant risks and opportunities invited by the de-linking proposals together with the need for further mitigation measures.

Which of Halton's 5 strategic priorities does this topic address and what are the key objectives and improvement targets it will help achieve?

A Healthy Halton, Key Objectives C and E
Urban Renewal, Key Objectives A, D and E
Children and Young People, Key Objectives A and E
Employment learning and Skills, Key Objectives A and C

Nature of expected/desired PPB input

Involvement by a small number of Members and officers in a working group for approximately 4 or 5 meetings. Working Group reports to be considered by PPB as appropriate.

Preferred mode of operation

As above but with presentations by others as necessary, for example on the Regeneration Strategy Options and the MG Sustainable Transport Strategy.

Media/Communication implications/opportunities arising from examining this topic.

None at this stage.

Agreed and signed by:

PPB Chair Officer

Date Date

Name of Board: Urban Renewal Policy and Performance Board

Date of Meeting: 16th September 2009

Report Title: The Implications of De-linking the Silver Jubilee Bridge – Topic Group Progress Report

Author: Mick Noone

STANDARD SECTIONS – CHECKLIST

All reports must be submitted together with the following checklist fully completed

	Yes	No
Resource Implications The financial, manpower and land (buying or selling) considerations should be clearly detailed including any corporate implications of following the recommended course of action.		N
Social Inclusion Implications Any implications relating to social inclusion/anti poverty should be highlighted	Y	
Sustainability Checklist Any implications that affect the sustainability themes of economy society and the community and the environment should be included,	Y	
Best Value Any Best Value implications should be included.		N
Legal Implications Any Legal implications should be included.		N
Crime and Disorder Issues Any crime and disorder implications should be included.		N

Please review these potential effects, within the context set out overleaf, to compose your summary assessment

Summary assessment of Implications: The report notes progress made by the Topic Group is assessing the potential implications of de-linking the SJB. There are no direct implications at this stage but it is noted that further evaluation of Options may take place in the future.