

HT/04/08**Committee Highways and Transportation Policy Development Group****Date 17 January 2008**

AN UPDATE ON THE A120 ROUTE IMPROVEMENT BETWEEN BRAINTREE AND THE A12

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1. Purpose of the Report

The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the A120 route improvement between Braintree and the A12.

2. Introduction and Background

The A120 between the M11 and the A12 is a trunk road and is on a Priority Axis for project funding on the Trans European Network for Transport (TEN-T). The route is a dual carriageway from the M11 to east of Braintree where the route becomes a single carriageway to the A12 at Marks Tey. On the 4th February 2005 the Highways Agency launched a public consultation on proposals for the construction of a new dual carriageway road between Braintree and the A12 south of Marks Tey. The Agency put forward a “Proposed Southern Route” and also showed alignments of three other routes which had been discarded. At that time the provisional programme indicated that a “Preferred Route” announcement would be made in 2006 and the road would open to traffic in 2013. It is understood that a report of the consultation has been prepared for the Agency but this will not be available until a decision on the route is announced. No announcement has yet been made. There is a major difficulty in funding a scheme of this size from the Regional Funding Allocation and efforts are being made to persuade the Government to designate the A120 as part of the country’s “Core Network” of trunk roads whereby funding responsibility would transfer to the Government. The Highways Agency has indicated the scheme is unlikely to be open for traffic until 2018 at the earliest.

3. Meeting with the Minister

Cllr Norman Hume, the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transportation, wrote to the Secretary of State for Transport asking for a decision to be progressed and also asked for a meeting to discuss the issue. An invitation was extended to Cllr Hume who, with Tony Ciaburro, the Director for Development, Highways and Transportation, attended a meeting with Tom Harris MP, the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Transport, in the company of local MPs and representatives from other interested groups. At this meeting Tom Harris advised that the legal position was currently being reviewed and the result of the review would determine the speed with which any announcement could be made. If the review advised the legal position was satisfactory then it was hoped that an announcement of the preferred route for the scheme would be made in February 2008. In the event that the legal position was not satisfactory then the legal advice would be followed and this may lead to a further public consultation and, following analysis of the results, it was to be hoped an announcement would be made in the summer of 2008. A further meeting is being sought.

4. Further support for the scheme

The East of England Regional Assembly have announced that they are keen to see a study carried out to document the wider economic benefits that the completion of the scheme would bring to the area generally over and above the straightforward economic cost-benefit analysis normally carried out. The County Council has advised its willingness to support and be involved with such a study and a brief is being prepared for the study.

5. Traffic Congestion on the existing route

Traffic congestion on the existing portion of the A120 is becoming a serious problem particularly in the morning and evening weekday peak hours and notably, but not exclusively, at Galleys Roundabout, at Marks Farm Roundabout and at Marks Tey. Access to the A120 from some side roads, for example from Stisted, is also very difficult. Even if a decision on the route of the new road was made now it would still be at least 10 years before such a road opened to traffic. The County Council has therefore reached agreement in principal with the Highways Agency to a joint study to develop schemes to reduce this congestion. To assist in funding this study a bid will be made for European funds in response to the next call for the annual round of funding from the Multi Annual Indicative Programme which is expected to be launched in March 2008.

6. Conclusion

The County Council will continue to press for the early implementation of a new dual carriageway between Braintree and the A12 and in the meantime, will work with the Highways Agency to reduce traffic congestion on the existing route. Additionally the County Council will utilise the two pieces of work (the European Funding Bid for the study to reduce congestion and the wider Economic Study) to ensure that the scheme is included in the work to refresh the Regional Funding Allocation programme which will take place during 2008.