

**Open Report on behalf of Andy Gutherson,  
Interim Executive Director for Place**

Report to:	<b>Highways and Transport Scrutiny Committee</b>
Date:	<b>11 March 2019</b>
Subject:	<b>Midlands Connect Update</b>

**Summary:**

This report updates the Committee on the role of Midlands Connect, the Sub-National Transport Body within which Lincolnshire sits. It also provides information on work which Midlands Connect is doing in relation to the Major Road Network and other studies affecting Lincolnshire.

**Actions Required:**

Members of the Highways and Transport Scrutiny Committee are invited to consider the report and comment on any issues of concern.

## **1. Background**

### Sub-National Transport Bodies

- 1.1 Section 21 of the Cities and Local Government Devolution Act 2016 provides for the establishment of Sub-National Transport Bodies (STB) in the regions of England, outside London, to give advice to the Department of Transport (DfT) on strategic transport decisions. STBs can be established on a statutory or non-statutory basis. If they decide to go for statutory status, then agreement is needed from all the constituent local and combined authorities, followed by discussions with DfT to agree the precise statutory powers to be given. The final step is to seek approval from Parliament. To date, only Transport for the North (TfN) has become a statutory STB.
- 1.2 Midlands Connect (MC) brings together the East and West Midlands in a single STB covering 22 local authorities. Currently this exists as an informal partnership. However, MC is currently working with its constituent authorities to develop future governance arrangements, including a formal constitution. This included whether or not MC should seek statutory STB status in future. Even if agreement could be reached to pursue statutory status, it is unlikely that could be progressed until 2020 or even 2021, due to severe constraints on parliamentary time. Currently Midlands Connects is funded (for both studies and administration) by direct grant from DfT until March 2020, after when it is not clear what level of funding may be available from central

government. This issue is also being considered as part of the work on future governance arrangement, including the need or otherwise of the member authorities to contribute to future administration costs.

- 1.3 It is clear that Central Government sees STBs as having a key role going forward. Most recently, DfT Guidance has confirmed that they will be responsible for determining priorities for proposed Major Road Network and Large Local Major schemes across their areas (see below). With STBs still in their early development across the country, to date there has been no clear advantage demonstrated to pursuing statutory status. At present, the general view across the MC authorities is that there appears to be little advantage in doing so but discussions are continuing.
- 1.4 The principles guiding Lincolnshire's position on MC are:
- It should deliver additionality i.e. a better deal for the Midlands that can only be achieved through joint working
  - There should be clear benefits to Lincolnshire
  - Only become a statutory STB if there is an advantage in doing so
  - Costs are proportionate to benefits and financial risks are minimised

#### Major Road Network and Large Local Major Schemes

- 1.5 In March 2018, the Committee received a report on the DfT consultation on proposals to create a 'Major Road Network' (MRN), to sit below Highways England's Strategic Road Network (motorways and trunk roads) and comprising the more important local authority A roads. This network would then be eligible to bid for improvement funding from the new National Roads Fund due to come into being in 2020/21 when all vehicle exercise duty will be ring-fenced for road improvements.
- 1.6 Following on from this consultation, DfT published their "Investment Planning Guidance for the Major Road Network and Large Local Majors Programmes" shortly before Christmas 2018. In terms of the extent of the MRN, the guidance re-confirmed the original criteria used to define the network (primarily relating to all traffic and HGV flows). Consequently few changes were made nationally to the earlier indicative MRN. The final MRN is shown at Appendix A. In Lincolnshire, arguments (supported by Midlands Connect) that the A158, A52 Boston - Grantham and A15 Sleaford – Peterborough should be included were not accepted by DfT.
- 1.7 The DfT Guidance also confirmed the following in terms of eligible schemes:
- Proposed MRN schemes should typically be seeking a DfT contribution of between £20m and £50m
  - Schemes seeking a contribution of more than £50m would be considered through the Large Local Majors (LLM) funding process
  - Local contributions of at least 15% will be expected

- To be considered for inclusion in the early years of the first 5-year MRN funding programme (2020/21 to 2024/25), schemes would preferably need to be at Outline Business Case (OBC) stage by summer 2019
- For schemes seeking inclusion in the later years of the 5-year period, it is desirable that they are at Strategic Outline Business Case (SOBC) stage by summer 2019 or meet the minimum business case criteria set out in the guidance.

1.8 The role of the Sub-National Transport Bodies has been confirmed by DfT as:

- To prepare a Regional Evidence Base (REB) to facilitate a long-term strategic approach to the investment needs of a region to support future growth
- To include as an output to the REB, a 'Top Ten' priority investment list for the MRN for the first 5 year period (2020/21 to 2024/25)
- Where a region has more than 2 or 3 potential LLM schemes within its area, then the STB should provide a prioritised list of such schemes.
- This information to be submitted to DfT in summer 2019 (assumed to be the end of July)

1.9 Midlands Connect has been engaging with local authorities on the preparation of the Regional Evidence Base and assessment of candidate MRN schemes. As a first step, authorities were asked to identify lengths of the MRN where "transport connectivity" was a problem and set out what, if any, work had been done to date to identify solutions. Taking into account the limited MRN in the county (see Appendix 1) and the need to meet the DfT criteria listed earlier, the following corridors were put forward for Lincolnshire:

**Completing the Lincoln Orbital** – Together with the Lincoln Eastern Bypass currently under construction, this would address the congestion and journey time variability around Lincoln. The development of proposed North Hykeham Relief Road is progressing with an Outline Business Case nearing completion. The proposal supports the authority's own Lincolnshire Coastal Highway strategy and is also identified as an issue in Midlands Connect's A46 Corridor study. The single carriageway sections between the A15 and A158 were also highlighted to Midlands Connect.

**A16 Through Boston** – There is considerable congestion and delay through the town, coupled with the severance caused by the traffic on John Adams Way. Proposals for a Boston Distributor Road are under investigation, with the first phase being delivered by ongoing development. A separate bid direct to DfT for £1m development funding for the proposal has recently been made.

**A17 Through Lincolnshire** – The route across Lincolnshire is congested and lacks resilience when incidents occur. It is often mentioned as an issue by local businesses, in particular the haulage industry. Route Action Plans have been prepared which have identified some smaller scale schemes

(e.g. enhancements at the A16/A17 Sutterton roundabout) but further work is needed to identify larger scale improvement which fit the DfT criteria (i.e. contributions of at least £20m)

**A15 North of Lincoln** – Similar to the A17 above, the route is a source of delay with variable journey times (particularly when incidents occur) and heavily used by HGVs. It forms part of the wider cross-country A46 Corridor being promoted by Midlands Connect. To date, no firm proposals which would meet the DfT criteria have been explored.

1.10 Midlands Connect's emphasis is on the need to prepare a credible programme which is deliverable within the timescale (i.e. in the period 2020/21 to 2024/25). A recent paper to the Midlands Connect Steering Group identified 8 "strong" candidates for the Top Ten list and a further 11 schemes on a "reserve" list where further assurance on the deliverability of the schemes was needed from the local authority. The lists highlighted two issues, namely:

- There are a limited number of schemes across the region which are sufficiently advanced to fully meet the criteria being set by DfT and Midlands Connect. Advancing a scheme of this scale to SOBC stage requires substantial upfront funding by an authority at its own risk.
- There is strong imbalance in favour of the West Midlands – with 7 out of 8 strong candidates and 14 out of 19 overall.

1.11 In respect of Lincolnshire, the proposed North Hykeham Relief Road would require a DfT contribution in excess of £50m and as such will be considered as a Large Local Major (LLM) scheme. Midlands Connect believes that there may be 5 such schemes across their area and are currently deciding how they might prioritise these. An Outline Business Case for the scheme is currently being finalised before being shared with Midlands Connect.

1.12 Proposals to address the other three Lincolnshire corridors are not sufficiently well advanced to feature in the Midlands Connect programme for the first 5-year period. However, along with many other proposals across the Midlands Connect area, they are on a long list for possible consideration in the next period (i.e. for delivery in 2025/26 onwards) subject to further work by the authorities. In respect of dualling the section of the existing Lincoln Bypass between the A15 and A158, this was dismissed as not meeting the minimum criteria for DfT contributions (i.e. less than £20m).

1.13 A final decision of both the Top Ten MRN schemes and priorities for LLM schemes is due to be endorsed at the Midlands Connect Strategic Board meeting in June 2019 and considered by the Partnership Advisory Board in early July.

- 1.14 Now that DfT Guidance has finally been published and the role of Midlands Connect clarified, there is an opportunity for the authority to consider where the focus of future feasibility work on both MRN and LLM schemes should be in Lincolnshire to ensure that the authority is in strong position for any future rounds of funding.

#### Other Midlands Connect Studies

- 1.15 Midlands Connect are also undertaking a wide range of strategic studies, both road and rail, across their area to look at the economic case for improvements. These will form the basis for discussions with DfT to try and secure the necessary funding. Ongoing studies which relate to Lincolnshire are:
- **A46 Corridor** – This study is looking to develop a case for improvements to the A46 corridor across the Midlands from the M5 in Gloucestershire through to the Humber Ports of Immingham and Grimsby. As well as considering the issue of the A46 around Lincoln, the study is also looking at the role that the A15/M180/A180 corridor might play in the overall strategy.
  - **Nottingham to Lincoln Rail Corridor** – Building on the Birmingham-Nottingham rail corridor study, this study is looking at constraints along the Nottingham-Lincoln rail corridor (including the Newark Flat Crossing) and how best both journey times and the number of services might be improved.
  - **A1 Upgrade to Motorway** – This study is due to commence during 2019/20 and will look at the case for upgrading the A1 from Peterborough to Blyth to motorway standard.

## **2. Conclusion**

The role and responsibilities of the Sub-National Transport Bodies is gradually being confirmed by DfT as further guidance is published. It is therefore important that the authority engages fully with Midlands Connect in order to secure the best outcomes for Lincolnshire.

## **3. Consultation**

### **a) Have Risks and Impact Analysis been carried out?**

No

### **b) Risks and Impact Analysis**

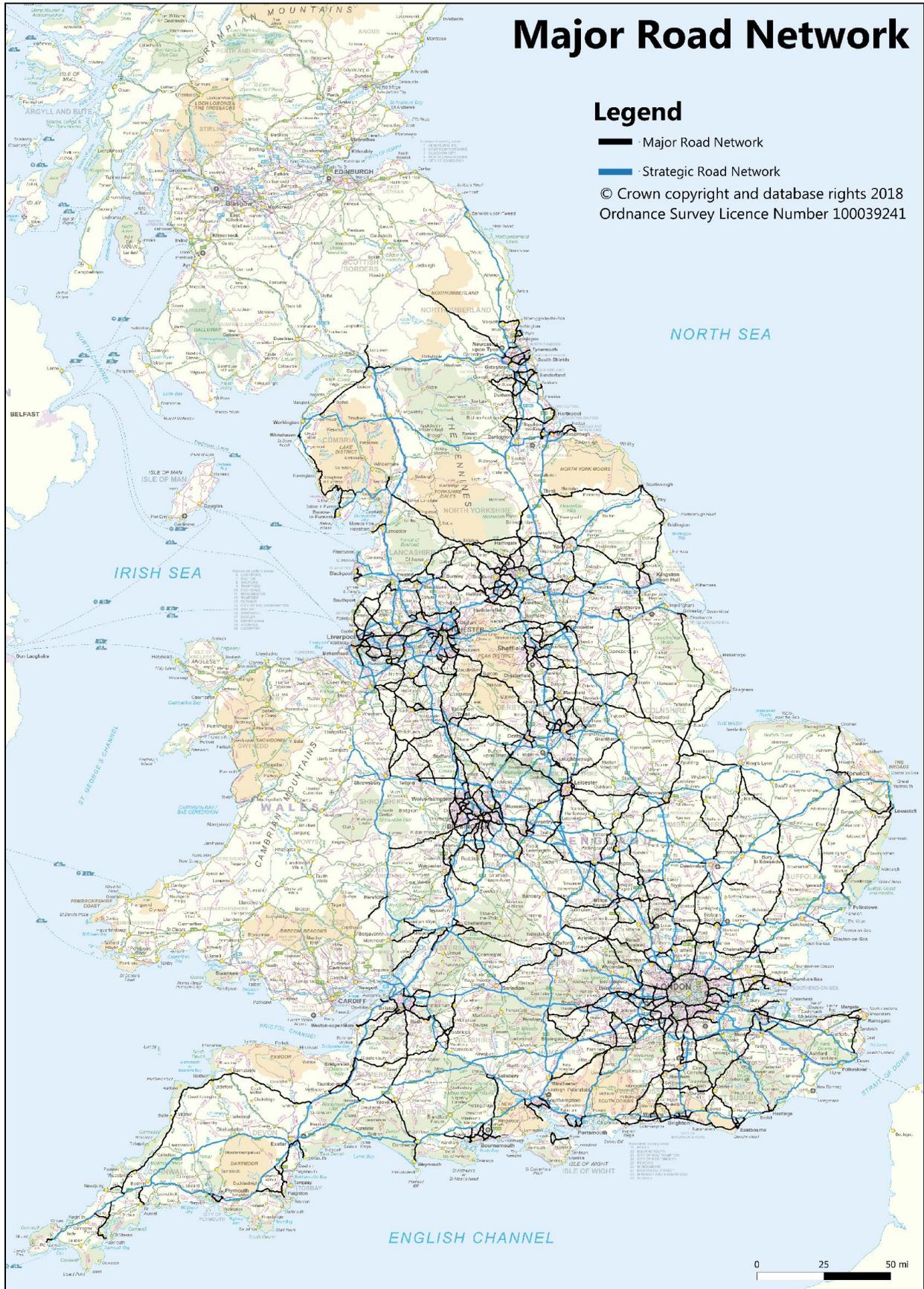
Not applicable

#### **4. Appendices**

These are listed below and attached at the back of the report	
Appendix A	DfT Major Road Network

#### **5. Background Papers**

This report was written by Ian Kitchen, who can be contacted on 01522 553058 or [ian.kitchen@lincolnshire.gov.uk](mailto:ian.kitchen@lincolnshire.gov.uk).



This page is intentionally left blank