

Subject: Highways England Road Investment Strategy 1 (RIS1) &  
A47 Alliance update

Report to: Economic Development Committee 15 July 2019

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#### **SUBJECT MATTER**

**This report provides an update on the progress to date of the Highways England (HE) Road Investment Strategy 1 (RIS1) which provides for a funding period from 2015 to 2020, with a focus on proposed projects in Great Yarmouth.**

#### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

**Members note the progress of the Great Yarmouth RIS1 projects to date and agree to continue to support the County Council and A47 Alliance to maintain ongoing lobbying to see the projects, particularly the Vauxhall roundabout, delivered as soon as possible.**

### **1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

1.1 The Department for Transport published its Road Investment Strategy (2015 to 2020) in December 2014. This included a range of improvements to the A47 in Norfolk, including junctions at Great Yarmouth.

1.2 Unfortunately, since then there has been little in the way of delivery of those projects by Highways England (HE). There has been a local improvement completed by Norfolk County Council near the Vauxhall roundabout at the Station approach, providing a right turn out at the traffic signals.

1.3 HE have reviewed likely changes to traffic patterns arising from the 3rd River Crossing. This has resulted in changes to their proposals for A47 junction improvements in Great Yarmouth. The review has concluded that there will be no need for an improvement at the Gapton roundabout with a 3rd River Crossing constructed, however it has also shown that there is a need for an improvement at the Vauxhall roundabout regardless of the delivery of the 3rd River Crossing.

1.4 It is essential that all parties continue to make the case for the Vauxhall junction improvement to be delivered by Highways England as soon as possible and for it to remain part of the funded RIS1 package of A47 improvements.

## **2 BACKGROUND**

2.1 In December 2014 the Department for Transport set out its proposals for the Road Investment Strategy 1 (RIS1) and included details of projects included as part of the funding to be delivered between 2015 and 2020.

2.2 For Norfolk, the most significant projects included as part of RIS1 are:

- Great Yarmouth A47 junction improvements
- A47 Blofield to Burlingham upgrade to dual carriageway
- A47/A11 Thickthorn junction improvement
- A47 Easton to North Tuddenham upgrade to dual carriageway

Other minor improvements to the A47 Acle Straight have been delivered under the RIS1 programme.

2.3 The budget allocated to the projects exceeded £300m. As the A47 is part of the network managed and maintained by Highways England they were responsible for the delivery of the projects. Early work included the development of proposals and consultation relevant to determine and make a Preferred Route Announcement (PRA) for each of the projects.

2.4 All of the above projects have seen delays to their delivery, more recently as a consequence of a significant re-procurement exercise by Highways England – ‘routes to market’. That has now concluded and the new contractor/consultant team (Galliford Try/Sweco) has been appointed and are now starting to progress the projects again. Their new contract is an improvement in that they will be responsible for the delivery of the projects through their statutory processes and construction, to completion.

2.5 For Great Yarmouth, the PRA details were published in August 2017 and confirmed that two key junctions were to be improved, which were:

- Vauxhall Roundabout (provision of a larger roundabout and new additional bridge over the railway line, and an upgrade to the Station approach junction to enable right turns out)
- Gapton Roundabout (an upgrade to the existing traffic signals)

2.6 Since then, Norfolk County Council, in discussion and agreement with Highways England, has completed an improvement to the traffic signals at the Station approach junction. This has been well received and has provided localised improvements to traffic movements.

## **3. PROPOSALS**

3.1 Economic Development Committee are asked to consider the progress to date and to confirm support for the County Council and the A47 Alliance to continue to lobby Highways England and the Government to deliver an improvement at the Vauxhall

roundabout as soon as possible. The current status of the Great Yarmouth projects is set out below.

3.2 Following the announcement of the PRA, to provide improvements at the Vauxhall and Gapton roundabouts, Highways England has also been working with NCC to assess the implications on the highway network as a result of the delivery of the 3<sup>rd</sup> River Crossing. The findings from this work has highlighted that, with a 3<sup>rd</sup> River Crossing constructed, the changes in traffic flows, particularly the significant reduction in traffic crossing Haven Bridge, demonstrates little need for any upgrades or changes to the Gapton roundabout.

3.3 However, the modelling work completed did continue to highlight the need for an improvement at the Vauxhall roundabout and that the current proposals needed to be optimised to ensure adequate performance of the junction.

3.4 The 3<sup>rd</sup> River Crossing project is now well advanced through its statutory process, with the Development Consent Order accepted by the Planning Inspectorate and the Examination in Public anticipated to commence in the late summer (see separate report on the agenda). This has prompted Highways England to set out that it will now review the impact of the 3<sup>rd</sup> River Crossing on the network before developing its proposals for the A47 junctions (including the Vauxhall junction).

3.5 Whilst a review of the A47 junctions in Great Yarmouth is logical, it raises concerns that this will result in an extended delay to the key junction improvement required at the Vauxhall roundabout. Both Norfolk County Council and the local MP, Brandon Lewis, have therefore been in contact with Highways England in order to press home the importance of the delivery of this junction improvement as soon as possible.

3.6 At a recent event in Westminster, hosted by Brandon Lewis MP on behalf of the A47 Alliance, concerns about the lack of delivery of the RIS1 projects, including in particular the Vauxhall roundabout junction, were made to the Roads Minister, Michael Ellis. This also included a need to consider improvements to the Vauxhall junction being designed so that this provides the ability for the dualling of the Acle Straight to also be delivered as soon as possible, something that is included in the A47 Alliance RIS2 request.

#### **4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

4.1 There are no direct financial implications for Norfolk CC or Great Yarmouth Borough Council as all costs related to the RIS1 delivery rest with Highways England, however it is worth acknowledging in this report that the transport benefits that the Vauxhall roundabout improvement will bring will not be realised without delivery of the improvement.

#### **5. RISK IMPLICATIONS**

5.1 Key risks are identified as:

- The complex design solution at the Vauxhall junction will include a rail bridge and

is likely to be relatively expensive due to existing poor ground conditions and difficulties of delivery due to complex traffic management.

- There is a risk that due to ongoing delays the funding for the Vauxhall project could be lost. It is possible that this could be moved to the RIS2 programme (from 2020 to 2025), however there are no guarantees of this and it is considered essential that the Vauxhall improvements are continued to be progressed under the funding provided by RIS1.

## **6. CONCLUSIONS**

6.1 To date, poor progress has been made by Highways England on the delivery of the proposed A47 junction improvements in Great Yarmouth. The only completed works, by Norfolk County Council, were the improvement of the right turn out of the Station approach junction.

6.2 There is potential for additional delays to the delivery of the Vauxhall roundabout improvement as a consequence of Highways England waiting to see what impact the 3<sup>rd</sup> River Crossing has on network performance. However the modelling completed indicates a clear need for an improvement at Vauxhall with or without the 3<sup>rd</sup> River Crossing.

6.3 It is agreed that there is no need to deliver an improvement at the Gapton roundabout with the delivery of the 3<sup>rd</sup> River Crossing and it makes sense to put this work on hold on the assumption that the 3<sup>rd</sup> River Crossing works will commence late in 2020.

6.4 It is considered essential that Norfolk County and Great Yarmouth Borough Councils continue to press for the Vauxhall improvements to be delivered as soon as possible and that these remain part of the current RIS1 funded programme. This is supported by Brandon Lewis MP and the A47 Alliance.

## **7. RECOMMENDATIONS**

**Members note the progress of the Great Yarmouth RIS1 projects to date and agree to continue to support the County Council and A47 Alliance to maintain ongoing lobbying to see the projects, particularly the Vauxhall roundabout, delivered as soon as possible.**

*Areas of consideration: e.g. does this report raise any of the following issues and if so how have these been considered/mitigated?*

<b>Area for consideration</b>	<b>Comment</b>
Monitoring Officer Consultation:	via Executive Leadership Team
Section 151 Officer Consultation:	via Executive Leadership Team
Existing Council Policies:	Great Yarmouth Corporate Plan Great Yarmouth Local Plan Core Strategy (Core Policy CS16)
Financial Implications:	None
Legal Implications (including human rights):	None
Risk Implications:	Considered
Equality Issues/EQIA assessment:	None
Crime & Disorder:	None
Every Child Matters:	None