

Thank you for your recent contacts with Bristol City Council regarding a number of issues you believe relate to the proposed South Bristol Orbital Highway mentioned in the BANES Options Appraisal Report and WECA JLPT4.

I have been in contact with the Council's Strategic City Transport Team who would have oversight of future transport plans within the City. As you have raised a number of issues we felt that it would be helpful to clearly lay out the current position in relation to the proposed road. Below are the comments from the service:

"1. Origin/timeline of the SE orbital link:

The Joint Spatial Plan (JSP) was drafted in 2016 by the four authorities of the West of England, which sets out potential sites for housing and employment development across the West of England over the next 20 years. The purpose of the JSP is to direct new development to the identified sites in order to be able to approve much needed housing developments in a more efficient way.

The Joint Transport Study (JTS) was completed in 2016 and its purpose was to identify the required transport mitigation measures required for the proposed housing and employment sites in the JSP. The JTS provided the technical evidence to show the types of infrastructure required for each site in order to not detrimentally impact on the existing transport network.

Both the JSP and the JTS were put out to public consultation across the West of England in 2016 and this was the first opportunity for the public to comment on a potential orbital link in SE Bristol. At this point, the JSP and JTS also received political endorsement from all leaders across the West of England.

Following the consultation, further work was carried out to separate the schemes in the JTS into mitigation packages for the housing sites identified in the JSP. This was the development of the Options Assessment Reports (OARs). The OAR for the SE Bristol package includes a number of mitigations for the proposed housing sites at Whitchurch, Keynsham and Brislington. These mitigations are:

- A SE orbital link from the A4-A37 and connecting into roads in Bristol;
- Callington Road link to improve access on the A4 for rapid public transport services;
- Relocate the Hicks Gate P&R site to the Hicks Gate roundabout;
- Provide a new P&R site on the A37;
- Provide an orbital metrobus route on the proposed orbital link;
- Walking and cycling improvements.

The OAR assessed a number of options for the SE orbital link and identified an option from the A4 to A37 that met the most objectives as set out in the OAR including economic and environmental impacts. Two options were identified for the connections into Bristol- Washing Pound Lane and Halfacre Lane- to connect to Whitchurch Lane. The OAR states that Whitchurch Lane is currently not suitable for increases in traffic and therefore we must work together with the community to identify a solution for this connection.

We have met with the South Bristol Wrong Road Group to go through various options and have taken some ideas away to work on when we begin further work on this, that are suitable, deliverable and acceptable to the community.

As part of the adoption of the JSP, the outcomes of the OARs (which are adding more detail to the JTS, which has already been out to public consultation) were packaged together in the Emerging Findings Transport Report, which was made available to the public in November 2018. This report will support the JSP when it goes to Examination in Public in front of an Inspector in July 2019.

2. How the Local Plans fit in with this:

Despite the JSP being a West of England document, each local authority within the West of England is still required to produce a Local Plan that sets out the policies for new developments. The West of England authorities are all at differing timescales for producing their Local Plan drafts. Bath and North East Somerset Council (BANES) were first to put their draft document out to public consultation. BANES decided, in the interests of clarity, to include the outcomes of the SE Bristol package OAR in their consultation, to remind residents of the high level transport schemes that were included in the JTS and the work that has been carried out on the OAR.

Bristol City Council supported BANES with their local plan consultation, as we wanted to talk residents on both sides of the border through the high level options. We tried to make it clear in the consultation events that the options identified in the OAR are very high level and are subject to further design, including input from the public. The responses to the BANES local plan consultation will be analysed and will inform the future work we have to carry out before a SE orbital link is finalised.

Bristol City Council recently (April 2019) opened up public consultation on our Local Plan. As the Local Plan process involves a number of iterations, we did not include too much on the transport schemes, as a future iteration of the plan will identify any alignments. However, this will be after much more work is carried out in partnership with BANES on the SE orbital link as we are not yet in a position to put this detail (which is more localised than the general alignment of the corridor in the BANES boundary) in a draft plan.

3. How the Joint Local Transport Plan (JLTP) fits in:

The JLTP is the transport policy for the whole West of England. It sets out our aspirations for strategic transport measures up to 2036 and was heavily informed by the JTS, as the JTS document provided the technical evidence for the schemes and has already been out to consultation. It therefore includes the mitigations for the JSP, which includes proposals for a SE orbital link, as previously set out in the JTS.

The current consultation draft JLTP is not required for the Examination in Public of the JSP. The outcome of the Examination in Public, along with the consultation responses received on the JLTP will inform the necessary edits to be made to the document, which will be adopted by the West of England late 2019/early 2020 and will provide the policy document that we will work from for all strategic transport schemes, not just for the JSP schemes.

4. How the Housing Infrastructure Fund (HIF) bid fits in:

Central Government announced an opportunity for authorities to bid for funding to help unlock housing sites for development. The authorities in the West of England decided to bid for a package of works to unlock housing in the SE of the region. This includes the schemes in the SE package as listed in 1. above, which were included in the JTS consultation, as well as regeneration of the area around Temple Meads. The bid will be to deliver some elements, but will also be to design up some elements to more detailed state. Given that the SE orbital link is only at a high level state (OAR only- no other work has been completed on it), the HIF bid for this element will cover further design and options assessments only. We do not have any detailed plans already produced for the SE orbital link that we will then use the HIF bid to then build- I cannot be clearer on this. We have ONLY completed the OAR work, no further detailed work has yet been carried out on the SE orbital link.

You have requested a Freedom of Information request to have sight of the bid document, and have received the following advice from BCC and WECA legal teams:

We have considered your request for information in accordance with the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA). We can confirm that Bristol City Council holds the information requested, but this is being withheld in accordance with Section 22(1)(a) of the FOIA which covers information intended for future publication. The Government will be publishing the disclosable parts of the bid after it announces where the funding will be allocated across the country. Following this a report will be brought forward to the WECA Committee in the summer. We therefore advise that you check the authority's website ahead of these meetings for any such reports.

We also consider that Section 43(2) for Commercial Interests is engaged for some or all of the information that you have requested. Section 43(2) of the FOIA confirms that:

"Information is exempt information if its disclosure under this Act would, or would be likely to, prejudice the commercial interests of any person (including the public authority holding it)".

We consider that disclosing the requested information would prejudice Bristol City Council's commercial interests because a bidding process is in place and the bid will be considered against other local authorities for available funding and land values could be affected if the details of the bidding process were to be made public at this time.

This exemption is subject to a public interest test which means that consideration must be given to whether the public interest favouring disclosure is greater than the public interest in maintaining the exemption. We have weighed up the benefits to the public of releasing the information against the factors for not releasing it. On balance we find that the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosure.

5. Traffic monitoring cameras on Whitchurch Lane:

As mentioned, we are yet to draw up any briefs to commission any further work on the SE orbital link so the monitoring was not commissioned by Bristol City Council. It appears that BANES commissioned them to monitor overall existing movements to be able to feed in to future work for strategic transport improvements associated with the JSP. However, as I've mentioned before, we are yet to identify any future work on the SE orbital link- these cameras are to provide evidence to prepare for future work, upon which we will consult with members of the public.

6. Next steps:

We are not doing anything on the SE orbital link until the outcome of the Examination in Public as that will inform the direction for housing development in the West of England and therefore the transport mitigations required. If the SE orbital link remains to be required, we will then put begin to look at options for the SE orbital in more detail, which will include lots of consultation with residents.

JLTP- again, we will await the outcome of the JSP Examination in Public and take that, along with the consultation responses and make edits to the document, which will then be our strategic transport policy for the West of England when it is adopted.

7. Conclusion:

Please, please be assured that this is all the information we have and there is no other 'behind the scenes' work being carried out on the SE orbital link that we are not being transparent about. You now have everything we know, which should help put your mind at rest for now that nothing more is currently being done on this. "

I would like to add my assurances to those of the service. Officers do attempt to work in as open and transparent a way as possible. Whilst the concern of residents regarding the proposal for a SE orbital link are understandable, it is worth repeating that from a Bristol City Council perspective:

- The only existing plans / proposal are the High Level suggestions included in the JSP, JTS and OAR;
- The OAR makes it clear that Whitchurch Lane is not currently suitable for increases in traffic;
- Whilst the HIF bid did mention the proposal for a SE orbital link as this is just an High Level proposal, any funding from the HIF would only contribute towards further design and option assessments;
- Bristol City Council is not doing any further work regarding the SE orbital link proposal at this time;
- If further work is carried out on the proposal this will include significant consultation with residents.

It is important for the Service to work collaboratively with local groups, and that is fully the intention in this case. It is however unhelpful for Officers to be bombarded with requests for information and complaints regarding similar issues. It would therefore be appreciated if as a group you could co-ordinate any future Freedom of Information Requests to prevent multiple similar requests requiring response, as these all take up significant amounts of Officer time.

This response fully covers the position of Bristol City Council regarding plans for and work completed regarding the proposal for a SE orbital link. There is no further work being carried out at this point. We would therefore like to make it clear that this should be taken as a final response to all enquiries regarding the SE orbital link. We will not enter into any further correspondence regarding this matter at this time.

Whilst the proposal for a SE Orbital Link is in effect paused at this point. Please be assured that the Service has committed to arrange a meeting with interested parties such as the Wrong Road Group when any decision is made regarding the future of this project.