

North Yorkshire Local Access Forum

06 April 2017

A59 Kex Gill Realignment – Development Update**Report of North Yorkshire County Council****1.0 Purpose Of Report**

- 1.1 To provide an overview and progress report on the A59 Kex Gill Realignment.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 The A59 is a key Trans Pennine route between Skipton and Harrogate. There is a long history of land instability and movement of the land above the A59 to the west of Blubberhouses at Kex Gill.
- 2.2 This movement has caused a number of landslips, the most recent of which occurred in January 2016 and led to a closure of the A59 for 8 weeks.
- 2.3 As a result of the on-going slope instability, there remains a high risk that there will be further landslips in the future, which could potentially result in long term closures of the route, severely impacting on connectivity between Skipton and Harrogate.
- 2.4 Whilst short to medium term ‘management’ measures are being undertaken, the County Council recognises that in the longer term there is a need to develop proposals for a permanent solution. This is likely to be a major realignment of the route. As such improvements to the A59 at Kex Gill are identified within the County Council’s LTP, Strategic Transport Prospectus and also within the York North Yorkshire and East Riding Local Enterprise Partnerships, Strategic Economic Plan.
- 2.5 Improvements to the A59 also form part of a wider long term package of interventions aimed at improving east west connectivity between the East Coast & Humber Ports to Lancashire. These improvements will help to improve journey time reliability and safety across this important corridor.
- 2.6 In Autumn 2016 the County Council commissioned Mouchel to investigate potential options for the realignment of the A59 at Kex Gill and to develop a business case to enable the County Council to submit a bid for funding from the Department of Transport for the delivery of a realigned route.
- 2.7 A Steering Group has been established to provide strategic direction and support the scheme development process. This is chaired by Barrie Mason, Assistant Director Highways and Transportation, and includes officer representatives from the County Council, Craven District Council, Harrogate Borough Council, Mouchel and Department for Transport. The local County Councillor John Fort and Harrogate Borough Councillor Christine Ryder also provide Member representation on the Steering Group.

3.0 Current Progress

- 3.1 The first stage in developing the business case is to identify key objectives that any proposed scheme should seek to address. For the A59 Kex Gill realignment these have been identified as follows;
- Improve the resilience of the A59 route between Skipton and Harrogate;
 - Improve safety of road users on the A59
 - Support the case for east west connectivity;
 - Improve journey time reliability
 - Maintain the landscape, ecological and historical value of surrounding area;
 - Reduce impact and cost of scheduled maintenance on the A59;
- 3.2 Mouchel are currently in the process of preparing the Options Assessment Report (OAR), this is due for completion in April 2017. Once completed it will allow the most appropriate option / options to be selected and Mouchel will then prepare an Outline Business Case.
- 3.3 Options being considered include alignments
- within the Kex Gill valley close to the existing alignment of the A59
 - to the north of the Kex Gill valley
 - to the south of the Kex Gill Valley
- 3.4 One of the key issues to be considered is that all options need to ensure that the western end of the scheme includes the realignment of the Kex Gill Bridge. This has been identified as a local pinch point and potential accident location.
- 3.5 Additionally any options that tie into the existing network to the west of Blubberhouses junction should also consider the inclusion of an eastbound climbing lane to the Hopper House Hotel, to aid flow of traffic heading towards Harrogate. Incorporating this climbing lane, would also help to deliver another of the proposed interventions contained within the Strategic Transport prospectus.

4.0 Next Steps

- 4.1 Now that all the options have been identified an initial sift of the options will take place. The options will be sifted using the Department for Transport's Early Assessment and Sifting Tool (EAST), assessing them on various criteria including environmental considerations, economic and financial as well as deliverability. Following this assessment the options will then be either progressed or discarded. A full overview of the EAST process will be presented as part of the OAR.
- 4.2 The area of Kex Gill and its surroundings is considered to be of extremely high landscape and environmental importance. Given the fact that all of the potential options run either through or close to land with environmental designations it is important that all environmental impacts are fully considered. As part of the process discussions are on-going with key environmental stakeholders, including Natural England, Yorkshire Dales National Park and the Nidderdale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.
- 4.3 Mouchel are due to complete the OAR in April 2017. Following the completion of the OAR local public consultation will be undertaken together with further reports to BES Executive Members and both the Craven and Harrogate Area Committees. Following this it is anticipated that either one or a small number of options will be identified for further development and consideration as part of the Outline Business Case (OBC). The development of the OBC will enable the County Council to be in a position to bid for funding from the Department of Transport (DfT).

5.0 Discussions with the Department for Transport

- 5.1 Officers have recently been liaising with DfT officials to help identify potential funding sources and opportunities. Initial discussions have been extremely positive with the DfT indicating that they recognise the high risk of the potential landslip and its significant impact on the A59 as an important part of both the local and regional transport network. They have indicated that they are supportive in principle of the scheme and further have suggested that the scheme development process be accelerated.
- 5.2 The Forum should however note that the normal development time for a scheme of this nature would be in excess of five years, especially given the environmental designations of land in the area. It should therefore be noted that to compress this development timeframe into three years will be extremely challenging.

6.0 Financial Implications

- 6.1 The scheme development work is being funded from existing approved budgets. As the business case and discussion with DfT develops the financial implications for the delivery of the scheme will become apparent. However, the scheme acceleration is likely to change the spending profile for the project and a latest update will be provided at your meeting.

7.0 Equalities Implications

- 7.1 Consideration has been given to the potential for any adverse equalities impacts arising from the recommendations of this report. It is the view of officers that the recommendations included in this report do not have an adverse impact on any of the protected characteristics identified in the Equalities Act 2010. However, it is worth noting that the scheme will require a full Equalities Impact Assessment.

8.0 Legal Implications

- 8.1 At present no legal implications have been identified. As the scheme development process continues, detailed discussions will take place with the County Council's legal department with respect of the legal implications of options identified for inclusion within the OBC.

9.0 Recommendations

- 9.1 It is recommended that the Local Access Forum
- i) Notes the content of the report

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Background Documents: None