

A46 Member Partnership, 27/1/21
Virtual Meeting on Microsoft Teams
Meeting Notes

Attendees:

Cllr Mark Cargill, Stratford-on-Avon District Council (Chair)
Cllr Philip King, Harborough District Council (Vice-Chair)
Cllr Ben Taylor, Blaby District Council
Cllr Jill Simpson-Vince, Rugby Borough Council
Cllr Ozzy O'Shea, Leicestershire County Council
Cllr Ken Pollock, Worcestershire County Council
Cllr David Bill MBE, Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council
Cllr Heather Timms, Warwickshire County Council
Adrian Hart, Warwickshire County Council
Nick Dauncey, Warwickshire County Council
Tess Nelson, Harborough District Council
Karen Hanchett, Worcestershire County Council
Michael Warner, GFirst LEP
Cat Hartley, Blaby District Council
John Seddon, Coventry City Council
Nicola Small, Coventry City Council
Sarah Spink, Midlands Connect
Luke Willetts, Worcestershire LEP
Mark Palfreyman, Leicestershire County Council
Paul Harris, Stratford-on-Avon District Council
Peter Heath, Rugby Borough Council
Rob Thornhill, Harborough District Council
Shawn Riley, Wychavon District Council
Amanda Lawson-Smith, Gloucestershire County Council
John Rowley, Cheltenham Borough Council
Jonathan Dibble, Tewkesbury Borough Council
Kam Khokhar, Highways England
Kirstie Rae, Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council

1. Introductions and Apologies (Chair)

Cllr Cargill welcomed everyone to the meeting. Apologies were received from the following:

Cllr Vernon Smith – Tewkesbury Borough Council
Cllr Jim O'Boyle – Coventry City Council
Cllr John Boyce – Oadby & Wigston Borough Council
Cllr Patrick Molyneux – Gloucestershire County Council
Cllr Jeff Clarke – Warwickshire County Council
Victoria Lazenby – Highways England
Karen Moore – Highways England
Barry Bodin-Jones – GFirst LEP
David Hudson – Environment Agency
Colin Knight – Coventry City Council
Bill Cullen – Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council

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Stuart Maxwell – Leicester City Council

2. Chair's Update (Chair)

Cllr Cargill confirmed that since taking over as Chair he had been in contact with Jeremy Wright MP (Kenilworth and Southam) regarding his potential role to act as a 'Champion' for the A46. He subsequently received a draft document from the MP prior to its submission to Treasury which had taken place last week. The focus of the ask was around the TMTC proposition being developed by Midlands Connect for the wider A46 corridor. The Chair asked all members to contact their MPs to solicit support and demonstrate the resolve of this group.

Cllr King asked for confirmation of what we are asking MPs to do. What bids are we asking them to support particularly where they fall outside the RIS? Cllr Cargill confirmed that it is for the initial ask of around £2m to further develop the business case for the TMTC.

Cllr Bill and Cllr King were keen that no reference be made to a bypass east and south of Leicester, and that any improvements would be on the existing alignment of the A46/M69/M1. AH confirmed that was the case.

3. Minutes of the Previous Meeting and Matters Arising (Chair)

The Minutes of the meeting held in October 2020 were agreed. AH to send final version to ALS for uploading onto the A46 Partnership web page **[ACTION: AH/ALS]**.

4. Very Light Rail (Presentation from Nicola Small, Coventry City Council)

The Group received a presentation on Very Light Rail from Nicola Small, who is the VLR Programme Manager at Coventry City Council – slides to be circulated after the meeting **[ACTION: NS/AH]**.

NS confirmed that local companies were being used where possible to develop/deliver the scheme, and that significant progress had been made on vehicle assembly during the Covid-19 lockdown. She indicated that current light rail track systems require 600mm construction depth due to the weight of the vehicles, which often requires expensive utility diversions and typically costs around £9m per km. VLR only requires a 300mm construction depth which means utilities can largely be left in situ.

Testing of the vehicle will be undertaken at the Quinton Rail Technology Centre near Long Marston to the south west of Stratford-upon-Avon and the Innovation Centre at Dudley.

The initial VLR route will serve the University Hospital at Walsgrave, with a potential extension to Ansty Park. Other routes are under consideration within the city as part

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of a wider network which could include parts of Warwickshire and the HS2 Interchange at Arden Cross (UK Central).

The project is currently in the R&D stage (2018-2022), with the intention to prove the concept by the end of 2022. A Transport & Works Act will be required to deliver the phase of the scheme, which is hoped will be operational by the end of 2025.

Cllr Cargill thanked NS for the presentation. He asked if VLR could be used to link Stratford-upon-Avon with Long Marston as part of the Garden Village proposal.

NS indicated that VLR can use a ballast track, although it is not designed to interact with traditional heavy rail rolling stock. It is all about demand and economies of scale. Transport Design International (TDI) has suggested that the cost of vehicles could be as low as £0.5m each.

Cllr Cargill requested the opportunity to visit the test facility at some point. TDI, who are based in Stratford, have just been shortlisted for an award for one of their projects.

Cllr Pollock raised some issues over historical reductions in NO2 and CO2 levels, and had concerns over the range and recharging abilities of some emerging technologies.

JS indicated that by 2025 when the VLR network begins operation there will have been further significant improvements in battery technology. Coventry is one of 30 cities under ministerial direction regarding roadside emissions of NO2. It is imperative therefore that decarbonisation starts to take place. A joint proposal with WCC is being developed for the bus network to be operated by a fleet of electric vehicles, including a number of key inter-urban routes going into Warwickshire. The range of batteries have been extended and will continue to do so through further R&D taking place at facilities such as the Battery Development Centre currently being built on the outskirts of Coventry.

Cllr Simpson-Vince noted the proposed extension to Ansty Park in Rugby Borough, indicating that she thought it would be well-used (in and out-bound). She asked if stations were required or stops similar to those on traditional light rail systems, the projected time to build a kilometre of track and the impact on road disruption.

NS confirmed that they were not looking to build stations. The platform stops would cater for 2 vehicle lengths for peak demand periods. She would need to go back to R&D to confirm the time to build a km of track. Ultimately this is a vehicle which can operate within or adjacent to the highway, with minimal signalised junctions and avoiding obstructions such as trees and buildings. Initial discussions have taken place with WCC and RBC officers to begin thinking about how VLR opportunities can be safeguarded.

NS agreed to circulate details of 27th May 2021 online VLR conference details
[ACTION: NS/AH].

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JS indicated that VLR is a core part of the City Council's transport strategy going forward and is applicable to other areas (e.g. Kemble to Cirencester).

5. Highways England Update (Kam Khokhar)

KK indicated that he was attending in place of Victoria Lazenby due to home-schooling issues, and that he was happy to answer questions about specific schemes or provide an update following the meeting where appropriate. He noted the earlier comments around the TMTC submission to the Government and that Highways England is keen to work with Midlands Connect and other stakeholders to support this. He also noted the ongoing work which Highways England is undertaking with GCC and TBC in relation to the proposals for the A46 and M5 Junction 9 at Ashchurch (see Item 7a below for update).

Cllr Pollock asked about the forthcoming departure of the Chief Executive of Highways England and what it might mean for the organisation going forward.

KK confirmed that Jim O' Sullivan is leaving at the end of January 2021, and that Nick Harris will be taking over in a temporary capacity (he is the current Director of Operations). No specific information was available as to how his role will be backfilled.

AH noted that he along with JS and ND had recently met with colleagues from HE for an update on the A46 Coventry Eastern Junction improvements at Binley and Walsgrave. Binley is due to open to traffic by March 2022. A public consultation on the options for the Walsgrave junction is due to begin in June 2021 (an item on this could potentially be covered at the next meeting **[ACTION: AH]**).

Cllr Timms complemented the contractors (Osborne) with few complaints received and very good community liaison.

KK thanked Cllr Timms for her feedback and agreed to pass this onto the Binley project team. Walsgrave currently has a start date 2024/2025 in the RIS2 programme. Modelling and design work is currently being undertaken to inform the options consultation.

6. Midlands Connect Update (Sarah Spink)

SS confirmed that much has changed since the original MC strategy was developed in March 2017 (e.g. declaration of Climate Emergencies, Brexit, Covid-19). The strategy is being refreshed rather than fundamentally rewritten. Consultation materials will be available through the MC website at the beginning of next week. Aiming for completion of the refresh by Autumn 2021.

The refresh is taking account of the Government's revised approach to scheme appraisal, Building Back Better (including the need to Plan, Plan Plan) and the

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implications of the 'Levelling Up' agenda and what it means for the Midlands, Urban vs Rural, Coastal vs Inland.

The forthcoming engagement process will run to 29th March 2021 using a series of webinars, consumer research and an on-line tool to identify which schemes would be your priority and what this would mean in terms of costs and trade-offs.

Cllr Cargill noted from a recent article in the New Scientist magazine that last year more electric vehicles were sold than in the last decade.

Cllr King asked at what level of local leader MC are engaging with as part of the Strategy Refresh? What about planning leader engagement at District/Borough level as these are critical to future place-shaping and economic development. Is this mostly about strategic or local improvements? Will the proposed Webinars be open to everyone to attend?

SS indicated that top-tier highway authorities briefings take place every 6 months. She would be more than willing to engage with second tier Authorities including those along the A46 and A5.

SS confirmed that all projects with a strategic influence will be considered by MC. She noted that many of the schemes which are discussed by the Partnership are already in the pipeline.

SS asked what should be included in the TMTC plan.

Cllr Bill stated that the Coventry – Leicester rail improvements should still be a priority. The Midland Mainline electrification has stalled and HS2 eastern leg (Phase 2b) has now been shortened. There is support for schemes but implementation is where we are lacking.

SS confirmed that the East Midlands is the least invested area per capita. MC is supportive of a fully completed 'Y' network including early delivery of the Toton hub. A significant amount of MP engagement has been undertaken to gather support to ensure the eastern leg is not descoped given the capacity benefits it will bring to the classic network.

Cllr Simpson-Vince suggested that the strategy needs to be flexible enough to respond to different funding opportunities. The message to authorities is that schemes should be shovel-ready, and that Project C might need to come before Project A.

AH confirmed that he has forwarded details of the Webinars and registration details to all members and officers.

Cllr King requested a presentation to local District/Borough Leaders Group within Leicester and Leicestershire. SS to contact Cllr King direct to arrange **[ACTION: SS]**.

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Cllr King suggested this opportunity needs to be afforded to all second tier Authorities within the MC area, not just highways departments.

Cllr Cargill agreed that wide engagement is needed, and that further discussion should take place offline. SS is happy to talk to District/Borough Councils. Please let her know which groups she needs to engage with **[ACTION: All District/Borough Councils]**.

SS indicated that the current TMMC commission (Atkins/EY) is due to report at the end of February 2021 and will set out what should be included in the Growth Plan for the corridor. Key to the TMMC proposal is getting a number of Government departments talking and working together.

The MC Budget document identifies 3 priority corridor projects (A5, A50/A500 and A46). The A46 is the most advanced of these. There is significant political support for the A50/A500.

Cllr Bill noted the map of the route and asked if this could be used in correspondence. SS confirmed that it could be, but suggested the consultants text be omitted.

Cllr Cargill thanked SS and noted this caveat.

7. Garden Town/Garden Village Update

a. Tewkesbury Borough Council

JD reported that HIF funding has been confirmed for the new bridge over the railway to the north of the A46 and MOD base at Ashchurch. Planning permission is due to be confirmed in February 2021. The construction phase will follow subject to a successful outcome. Archaeological surveys are in the process of being undertaken.

ALS updated the Group regarding the M5 Junction 9/A46 LLM fund bid via the Western Gateway SNTB. The pre-SOBC submission was approved by DfT in March 2020. The SOBC has been submitted to DfT. The need for work to be undertaken on the HE network requires close working with them in developing the OBC. Public consultation is currently on hold until completion of checks and due diligence with HE, which has the support of DfT. Further work will be undertaken after the local elections in May 2021. A major improvement of the junction remains critical for the garden town proposal to be fully realised.

b. Stratford-on-Avon District Council

PH noted that the Long Marston Airfield isn't located directly on the A46, but lies 5 miles to the south. A significant proportion of traffic however would go north to access the M40 which would need to use the A46. The site is allocated in the SDC Core Strategy. A first phase of 400 dwellings has started on the ground after

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contamination was removed. The remaining 3100 dwellings are dependent on the proposed SWRR linking to the WSRR. Planning applications that have been submitted by the applicant are currently in abeyance. The SWRR has significant technical and environmental issues. A bid for HIF funding from Homes England was unsuccessful (total £135m with £40m contribution from the developer). A second phase of 500 dwellings is being promoted through a SAP in advance of any significant road infrastructure. It is likely that the role of LMA will be reassessed in the forthcoming South Warwickshire Plan (see Item 7d below).

c. Blaby District Council

CH explained that unfortunately Cllr Taylor had left the meeting in order to attend another commitment.

The Whetstone Pastures Garden Village is being promoted through the local plan review, and so therefore has no current planning status. Adoption of the local plan is expected in 2023. A range of technical work is underway for the site. The developer is undertaking an engagement exercise on the draft vision for the site, including the key principles should it progress to an allocation. The website is interactive with an ideas board and draft vision document. CH confirmed that the Steering Group includes representation from Harborough DC.

The technical work for the proposal is likely to continue into 2022. The wider project includes an additional junction on the M1 (20A). The scheme is referenced in the Midlands Connect strategy and is being actively being promoted by the developer in conjunction with LCC. The Leicester and Leicestershire Strategic Growth Plan is critical to support these aspirations.

d. Other emerging strategic development opportunities (All LPAs)

PH noted that SDC and WDC have started work on a joint South Warwickshire Plan to replace their existing Core Strategy/Local Plan – with a time horizon up to 2050. Some initial scoping has taken place with WCC and others. Accessibility will be key to any potential strategic development locations. Sustainable transport including measures such as VLR may have a role to play. Any case for the A46 to be upgraded to enable higher rates of development will also impact on how the plan goes forward.

SR indicated that in South Worcestershire they were adopting a rail based strategy, focusing a Garden Town at Norton linked to Worcestershire Parkway (North Cotswold Line meets Birmingham to Bristol Line) close to M5 junction 75000 houses planned to 2040 with a further 5000 beyond that.

SR also noted the proposal for a Garden Village at Throckmorton on the A44, with links to Pershore rail station and the A46.

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8. Improved Coordination of Litter picking and fly-tipping (Adrian Hart)

AH had circulated the current version of schedule ahead of the meeting, which captures the current regimes for those activities. There are a few gaps highlighted in the information which he requested from the relevant Authorities. The review has shown the variety in approach which exists across the corridor. The intention once complete is to circulate the document to colleagues and Highways England in order to help improve the co-ordination of these activities.

Cllr Cargill thanked AH for his help in pulling together this information.

9. A46 Action Plan/A46 Corridor Local Plan and SEP Update (Adrian Hart)

AH had circulated the documents for information. He noted that the Action Plan had been substantially updated since last meeting and encouraged members to review the content.

Cllr Bill noted the reference to the proposed south-facing slips at M69 Junction 2, and that this was something which had been considered when the M69 was built. He understood the argument for them being built, but stated there was widespread opposition to the proposed Hinckley SRFI with concerns around the additional HGV traffic which would be generated by the site (rail in/road out). There were also concerns regarding the impact on the local highway network and loss of valued countryside. He suggested that it should not be assumed the development will go through smoothly.

Cllr Bill also noted the reference in the Leicester and Leicestershire Enterprise SEP to widespread expansion of warehousing due to more online shopping and the location of counties such as Leicestershire in the centre of the whole network. He raised concerns over the implications this could have on loss of farmland and open countryside. He reported that the partnership in Leicester and Leicestershire is under strain due to similar growth problems across their geography.

AH noted that the Action Plan and Local Plan/SEP updates are designed to convey the facts as we know them, but recognised there are varying levels of support from partners on certain schemes and proposals.

10. Lobbying, Communications and MP Engagement (Chair)

Cllr Cargill reiterated the need to write to MPs to request support for the TMTC proposition and wider work of the Partnership, as discussed at the start of the meeting.

Cllr King suggested that we need to develop a medium/longer term plan for engagement, including the opportunity to lobby MPs on all aspects of the corridor (just as has been done successfully for the A5). **[ACTION: AH/A46 officer group in conjunction with Midlands Connect (SS)]**

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AH admitted that this has worked well for the A5 corridor and should put us on at least an equal footing with them.

11. Future Items (Chair)

a. A46 Partnership (North)

Cllr Cargill noted that AH had helped advise colleagues in the 'northern' section of the A46 when they established their Partnership. AH indicated the officer group is chaired by Andrew Pritchard, and that the political dimension is dealt with through Transport for the East Midlands (TfEM). Cllr Cargill asked AH to invite AP to attend the next meeting of the Member Partnership in June **[ACTION: AH]**.

b. Mapping of Housing and Employment Growth

AH suggested that it would be timely to update the previous mapping growth within the A46 corridor when the next round of housing data monitoring is available in September 2021. This work will be coordinated with colleagues through the officer group before being brought to a future meeting **[ACTION: AH/A46 officer group]**.

c. A46 Walsgrave Options Consultation

AH indicated that an item on this at the next meeting would be timely, with the HE consultation due to take place in June.

12. AOB

No items were raised.

Date of Next Meeting: 16th June 2021, 10.30-12.30 (Microsoft Teams)

The meeting closed at 12.33.