

Meeting Minutes

Army and Navy Taskforce Meeting #8

Project Army and Navy Junction, Chelmsford
Location Virtual meeting **Date/Time** 28 July 2020
Participants Cllr Kevin Bentley **KB**
Cllr Stephen Robinson **SR**
Cllr Dick Madden **DM**
Cllr Peter Sodowsky **PS**
Cllr Jenny Chandler **JC**
Cllr Jeremy Lager **JL**

	<p>Introductions</p> <p>KB welcomed everyone to the meeting. KB stated that the project team had been progressing the scheme and this meeting would provide an opportunity to update the Taskforce on that work.</p>
1	<p>Short-term options update</p> <p>The Taskforce was given an update on the short-term measures implemented to date and other proposed measures being progressed to improve the situation at the Army and Navy junction ahead of a long-term solution. It was mentioned that temporary signs had been installed on major routes into Chelmsford to direct through-traffic around the city rather than travelling via the Army and Navy junction. Meanwhile, new patches would very soon be added to alter the wording on the signs to reflect that the flyover has now been removed rather than simply closed. The installation of a large advanced directional sign had also been accelerated and yellow box markings had been put in place on Parkway. These would prevent vehicles queuing across the road, as well as improve the flow of traffic and bus journey reliability, while existing 'keep clear' markings outside the bus depot in Westway had been refreshed.</p> <p>It was explained that the removal of the flyover had created space for two potential new bus lanes (inbound and outbound at Parkway) without the need for any land acquisition, while changes to an existing crossing on Parkway and signal improvements at the Army and Navy junction were also being explored. The Taskforce was told that a stage 1 road safety audit had been signed off for the proposed measures and that the site investigation works carried out would assist in developing the long-term scheme, with information about statutory diversions and buried services helping to de-risk the programme.</p> <p>It was mentioned that when Vicky Ford MP, who was unable to attend the Taskforce meeting, was updated separately she was in support of the proposed new bus lanes on Parkway and recognised the importance of sustainable transport to the Army and Navy project. There was subsequently discussion about the need to ensure that any works to replace existing temporary fencing at the Army and Navy junction with permanent kerbing were coordinated to avoid the kerbing having to be removed soon after and, therefore, wasting money. It was referenced that KB and Vicky Ford MP were planning to write to the Department for Transport (DfT) to lobby for pinch-point funding which may enable other outstanding short-term measures, such as the bus lanes, to be delivered ahead of the long-term solution.</p>

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PS suggested that bus lanes had been proposed before but had not been progressed and asked whether they would be in operation only during certain times of the day.

It was explained the current thinking was that the bus lanes would be in place at all times but further discussions were still to take place and no final decisions had been made. It was added that the situation was different now and the removal of the flyover had created additional space which was not available when the bus lanes were explored previously.

KB remarked that although traffic was now increasing following the COVID-19 pandemic, it still was not at the levels it was prior to the outbreak. He suggested this was in part because many people were still working from home. **KB** emphasised the need to encourage people to switch from their cars to buses to improve capacity on the roads and also highlighted the air quality benefit.

The Taskforce was told that although traffic levels were gradually creeping back up the profile was very different, with the typical morning peak period nowhere near as high as usual.

PS remarked that bus services where he lived had been reduced, but he was advised this was temporary.

KB stated the COVID-19 pandemic had complicated things further because the message from Government had rightly been to avoid using public transport unless you had to and suggested there was now a nervousness among the public about using buses. He added that encouraging more people to use public transport would be difficult until their confidence is restored. **KB** emphasised it was a difficult situation and not easy to resolve. **DM** agreed and said there were currently a number of issues, including schools going back. **DM** asked what the current situation was for the county in terms of the number of vehicles on the roads and capacity.

The Taskforce was advised that traffic was currently at 90% of pre-COVID levels, with two-and-a-half times more traffic than during the lowest point of lockdown. It was added that the profile was very different, with increased traffic generally throughout the day and then an afternoon/evening peak, consistent with the pattern across the rest of the country. It was mentioned that it would be interesting to see what happened to traffic levels when schools re-opened in September.

The Taskforce was updated on the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) routes in Chelmsford and it was explained that the key philosophy was to provide the transformational improvements to infrastructure needed to achieve a shift to more sustainable modes of travel.

It was outlined that the first proposed route, 1A, would link Chelmsford Railway Station to Moulsham, connecting Parkway, through Central Park, along New Writtle Street and Lady Lane, across Princes Road and joining the existing cycle route in Waterson Vale. It was explained that this would include the replacement of the existing subway beneath Parkway with a toucan crossing, a possible bridge replacement in Central Park, a potential one-way system in residential roads in the Moulsham area and the removal of some on-street parking.

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It was added that the second LCWIP route, 2, would link the station and city centre to Chelmer Village and could include a one-way system on the full length of Victoria Road, improvements to Springfield Road and Trinity Road and signal improvements on Chelmer Road. It was explained that new toucan crossings were proposed, as well as the removal of some on-street parking. It was stated the intention was to undertake traffic modelling of the proposals to finalise requirements ahead of a full road safety audit of the proposed route.

The Taskforce was told the project team was also investigating options to potentially be included in a bid for the second round of the Emergency Active Travel Fund.

PS asked whether any other route improvements were planned, particularly in Great Baddow.

It was explained that the first route runs from the south of Great Baddow, creating a route from Baddow to the city centre. It was also explained that, as part of the long-term Army and Navy project, improvements were being made to ensure cyclists and pedestrians could navigate the junction safely and easily, while the team was also investigating options to ensure there was onward connectivity. This would lead to a route from the north of Great Baddow to the city centre.

KB stressed the importance of having properly segregated cycleways.

JL questioned how route 1A would work in practice, particularly in terms of the one-way system, and suggested there was unregistered land at the south of Hart Street which could be used to install a cycle-only route.

It was explained that there was not currently enough space in some roads in the Moulsham area to allow for cars and cyclists, which is why one-way systems were being considered to remove one direction of traffic and create space for cyclists. It was added that the one-way system would create a loop, maintaining access to Moulsham Street and businesses.

KB emphasised the need for good signage so that people were aware of any new routes and knew they could use them.

The Taskforce was told there had already been some discussions about signage to ensure consistency and that people knew their usage rights.

KB added that as well as signage on the routes, there should be signage to them, and suggested the signs were as important as the routes themselves.

SR questioned whether signs would include labels such as '5 minutes to the station' to emphasise how quickly people could get around by bike compared with travelling by car. He added that he would like to see London Underground-style coloured routes so that people could easily plan their routes.

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	<p>KB suggested the colours of the routes on the map could even match the colour of surface used for the cycle routes. He added that he felt this time was a significant turning point for cycling.</p> <p>This item of the agenda was rounded off with an indication of the next steps, with the Taskforce advised that work had been paused for the time being while funding opportunities were explored.</p>
2	<p>Army and Navy long-term improvements</p> <p>The Taskforce was told that the project team had met with DfT officers on 3 June and they had agreed to work with them on an ongoing basis and to review the outline business case for the project as soon as it is available, as opposed to having to wait for a certain window. It was added that the DfT had advised potential park and ride improvements could be included in the Army and Navy Major Road Network funding bid. However, the park and ride could not be forward-funded so that it could be delivered in advance and then the monies reimbursed by MRN funding.</p> <p>KB suggested delivering park and ride improvements ahead of the main solution at the Army and Navy junction represented an opportunity, but that further discussions were needed with Chelmsford City Council.</p> <p>It was stated that the project team was also currently responding to technical questions from the DfT about the project.</p>
3	<p>Park and Ride</p> <p>The Taskforce was presented with an update on work to progress park and ride proposals and bring them up towards the levels of work completed for the junction options. It was explained this has included revised access arrangements and new terminus buildings for both the expansion of Sandon and potential new sites at Widford, as well improvements to adjacent junctions. These included potential improvements to Widford roundabout and potential land required to ensure the best access arrangements.</p> <p>It was outlined that junction designs were expected to be refined during the next stage with a belief that the junction sizes could actually be reduced. It was explained that discussions needed to be held with landowners/developers.</p> <p>The Taskforce was told the project team was exploring the possibility of park and ride capacity improvements in advance of the main Army and Navy scheme. This would help manage traffic during construction, at which time lanes would likely have to be closed. It was expected many people would switch to using the park and ride during construction and it was hoped they would then continue to use the service in the longer-term. Modelling suggested demand for park and ride services during construction would exceed current capacity without expansion of Sandon or a new site at Widford. This would result in traffic queuing on the on-slip from Maldon Road and, therefore, this may need to be widened to accommodate a bus lane to enable swift travel into the city centre for the park and ride.</p> <p>It was reiterated that the DfT could contribute to the park and ride only if was part of the Army and Navy MRN bid but, in that case, it could then not be delivered early. If</p>

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	<p>the council wished to deliver park and ride improvements in advance of the long-term solution at the junction it would have to fund this separately. Four potential options for this were outlined. It was added that no decisions were needed now. Construction experts were looking at the phasing of works to allow modelling to be re-run to see the impacts of the different options. These could then be presented later in the year.</p> <p>Initial costs for the expansion of Sandon Park and Ride or a new park and ride site in Widford were provided, based on quantities for the initial site access proposals and historic layout costs for the existing park and ride sites in Essex.</p> <p>KB questioned the cost saving to ECC if a new park and ride site at Widford was included in the Army and Navy bid and was advised that ECC would need to make a 15% contribution to the MRN bid. However, this was likely to be up to 50% less than building Widford on its own separately.</p> <p>KB said he was keen for people to understand the consequences of delivering any park and ride improvements early, but also that they recognised the opportunity.</p>
4	<p>Army and Navy Junction Options</p> <p>The Taskforce was updated on the four remaining junction options – two-way flyover, hamburger roundabout, enlarged roundabout and separate T-junctions – and how each has been refined as part of the latest phase of work.</p> <p>It was explained that the two-way flyover option did not leave sufficient space for an inbound bus lane from the Odeon roundabout to the Army and Navy junction and could accommodate only a short outbound bus lane. It was added that improved walking and cycling facilities had been planned across all arms of the junction, as with all options, including segregated cycle lanes where possible. All options now included a parallel crossing across Baddow Road and the conversion of the existing crossing on Parkway to a toucan crossing. It was also proposed that all options would create access through Meadgate Terrace to the junction to enable access for pedestrians/cyclists and create a route for those in Great Baddow. Either hybrid cycle lanes or a two-way cycle route on one side of the road were proposed for Van Diemens Road. It was outlined that the sustainable transport measures for all options sought to create a coherent network to the city centre.</p> <p>The hamburger roundabout option allowed for inbound and outbound bus lanes on Parkway and similar walking and cycling facilities at the junction, plus a bus lane on Essex Yeomanry Way. It was added that all options now included a segregated left-turn slip road from Chelmer Road to Essex Yeomanry Way.</p> <p>It was outlined that the enlarged roundabout option followed a similar proposed layout as the hamburger roundabout but that cycle routes were more direct and went through the junction.</p> <p>It was explained that the first junction (from Parkway) as part of the split T-junctions option would see two lanes of traffic widening to four lanes at the junction, without the left slip to Chelmer Road. Three lanes would run through the junction with one going to Chelmer Road and the other two continuing towards Essex Yeomanry Way. Two lanes, plus a bus lane would run from Essex Yeomanry Way, widening in to Baddow</p>

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	<p>Road. Proposed walking and cycling facilities catered for all movements like the previous options and would, where possible, be segregated. The proposed parallel crossing of Baddow Road in all the other options, would be located on the proposed link between Essex Yeomanry Way and Baddow Road in this option.</p> <p>SR questioned whether costs would change as a result of the enhancement of the options and was told that costs were being updated but were not expected to change significantly as a result of the refinements. It was added that any difference in the benefit/cost ratio was likely to relate to delays during construction and that any noise or air quality impacts could be beneficial.</p>
5	<p>Communications and Engagement</p> <p>The Taskforce was updated on recent communications and engagement activity, which focused on the completion of the flyover removal works and the reduction in options following the decision to discount the minor road layout improvements. The group was told that a written update had been sent to key partners in April in place of planned workshops in March which were cancelled because of the COVID-19 outbreak. It was explained that various communications channels were also used to communicate with the wider public, including an advertorial package with Essex Live, a double-page spread in the Essex Chronicle, a time-lapse video of the removal works and the regular project email newsletter.</p> <p>A summary of the feedback from partners was provided. This included concerns about safe access to Parkway from Aldi, Moulsham Mill etc., however, it was stressed that this would be addressed by the proposed junction improvements. The Taskforce was advised that those who provided feedback stressed the importance of sustainable transport, which, pleasingly, was in line with the project objectives.</p> <p>The group was given an overview of how partners felt the junction options could be improved. This included improved walking and cycling facilities, both at the junction and throughout Chelmsford, which are already proposed through the Army and Navy project and LCWIP routes, as well as making it quicker and easier to cross Parkway, something already considered through the synchronisation of traffic and crossings as part of the junction proposals. It was stated that a pedestrian/cyclist underpass was also suggested but the project team felt the alternatives proposed would be more effective.</p>
6	<p>Programme</p> <p>The next steps in the project programme were outlined. This included recent work to update the strategic model and refine the options, as well as upcoming option testing at which point there may be an opportunity to reduce the options further. It was explained that air quality and noise modelling would then take place from November until February, with the team investigating combining work with the Chelmsford North East Bypass project to create efficiencies, while economic assessment would take place in parallel.</p> <p>The Taskforce was advised public consultation would then take place after the May 2021 local elections and would help in identifying a preferred option and finalising the outline business case, which is expected by about October 2021. It was added that if the DfT was satisfied with responses to various queries about the SOBC then a final version should be submitted in autumn 2020 for formal acceptance by DfT.</p>

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	<p>An indication of the longer-term programme was then given, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ The identification of a preferred option in autumn 2021▪ Various steps relating to the planning process (ecological surveys, securing of land, EIA scoping) ahead of the granting of planning permission in summer/autumn 2022▪ Detailed design and a final business case in spring 2023▪ The tender process before construction starts in autumn/winter 2023. <p>The group was advised construction would take approximately two years and would be expected to be completed in autumn/winter 2025. Examples were given of other major road infrastructure projects in Essex, including M11 J7A, Chelmsford North East Bypass and Fairglen, to emphasis the complexity of such projects and time taken to reach construction. It was explained that there were a variety of reasons why such projects take a long time, including risks regarding land agreements and utility diversions. It was added that the project team was accelerating work as quickly as possible and would continue to do so but that risks remained that could delay the programme beyond the current plan.</p> <p>KB reiterated the point, describing the project as a major road scheme and not just changing some lanes. He added that such projects typically took 10 years from conception to completion.</p> <p>KB questioned whether planning permission for the project would be determined by ECC or CCC.</p> <p>SR advised that CCC officers had previously expressed a willingness to help.</p> <p>KB stated that he did not mind which authority did this as long as it was done efficiently and did not become a long drawn-out process. The group was advised that legally the planning application could be handled by either authority and that ECC would work with CCC to determine the best way forward.</p>
7	<p>AOB</p> <p>There was no additional business.</p> <p>KB thanked people for attending and the project team for its work before closing the meeting.</p>