

## Report to the Cabinet

Meeting to be held on Thursday, 8 March 2018

### Report of the Head of Service - Planning and Environment

**Part I**

Electoral Divisions affected:  
All

### Department for Transport Consultation: Proposals for the Creation of a Major Road Network

(Appendix 'A' refers)

Contact for further information:

Dave Colbert, Tel: (01772) 534501, Specialist Advisor, Transport Planning

[dave.colbert@lancashire.gov.uk](mailto:dave.colbert@lancashire.gov.uk)

#### Executive Summary

The Department for Transport is consulting on proposals for the creation of a Major Road Network (MRN). Funding for improvements on the MRN will be available through the Government's new National Roads Fund from April 2020. Subject to a few minor reservations, the County Council is broadly supportive of the approaches proposed for defining the MRN and developing a programme of investment. This report summarises the Government's proposals and the rationale for the County Council's proposed response, which is set out in Appendix 'A'. It also identifies locations on the indicative MRN in Lancashire that could benefit from this initiative.

#### Recommendation

The Cabinet is recommended to approve the response set out in Appendix 'A' as the County Council's response to the consultation.

#### Background and Advice

The consultation outlines the Government's proposals for the Major Road Network (MRN) and seeks views on its core principles, the definition of the network, investment planning, and eligibility and investment assessment. It comprises 16 questions. The deadline for receipt of responses is Monday 19 March 2018. The Department for Transport (DfT) will publish a formal response during summer 2018 and will continue to engage with both local and regional bodies to support finalisation of the MRN Investment Programme to be launched later in the year.

The County Council welcomes the Government's proposal to create a Major Road Network and that funding from the new National Roads Fund will be available for improvements to this network from April 2020. Whilst expressing its broad support

for the approaches proposed for defining the MRN and developing a programme of investment, the Council has a few minor reservations, particularly with regard to cost thresholds. The indicative MRN is a fair reflection of roads the Council would expect to see included based on the draft criteria put forward for consultation and the Council's response includes a commentary on these roads. This also notes that some small lengths of road proposed for inclusion are clearly anomalies. The approach to investment planning and assessment, including the need for a robust evidence base to support investment decisions, is consistent with the Council's own processes for identifying major schemes through its five adopted Highways and Transport Masterplans.

In Lancashire, there are several locations on the indicative MRN where conflict arises between use of a particular route by longer distance traffic, including heavy goods vehicles, and the needs of local communities. Bypasses have been proposed in the past, but the limited funding available to improve important local roads relative to the Strategic Road Network has been a major barrier to delivery. Such locations include the abrupt termination of the M65 at Colne in East Lancashire and the A570 through Ormskirk in West Lancashire. In Central Lancashire, investment in the MRN is necessary to support strategic housing and employment developments of pan-Northern significance.

The Government intends the MRN will be of similar length to the Strategic Road Network (currently 4,400 miles) and comprise the most important roads currently managed by local authorities. Responsibility for management and maintenance of roads in the MRN will remain with local highway authorities. The Government has identified a number of core principles to assist with the definition of the MRN and its programme of investment, including:

- Increased certainty of funding through the National Roads Fund;
- A consistent network defined by a set of criteria and centrally agreed;
- A coordinated investment programme;
- A focus on enhancement and major renewals; and
- Strengthening links with the Strategic Road Network and ensuring that the two programmes of investment are complementary.

Subject to consultation responses, the DfT intends to use both quantitative (for example, traffic flow/composition) and qualitative (for example, links to economic centres) criteria to define the MRN. In addition, where appropriate the MRN will include roads that a previous government de-trunked<sup>1</sup> between 2001 and 2009. The DfT has developed an indicative MRN to support the consultation but is keen to stress this is not the final proposal. The DfT will review the MRN every five years, a process that will also consider changing the extent of the Strategic Road Network by trunking or de-trunking roads.

The County Council supports this approach, but qualitative and quantitative criteria need to work in tandem; focusing simply on traffic flow could result in the inclusion of a large number of urban roads, as these generally tend to have the highest traffic

---

<sup>1</sup> De-trunking is the legal process by which responsibility for a length of road transfers from the Secretary of State to the local highway authority.

flows. Likewise, too much emphasis on quantitative criteria could result in the exclusion of important pan-Northern routes such as the A59 between Preston and Skipton if former trunk roads are not included by default.

The County Council participated in the development of Transport for the North's Major Road Network as set out in its draft strategic Transport Plan, currently out for consultation. TfN's network is significantly larger than that proposed by the DfT, so clearly there will need to be a consolidation of views going forward, as it will be pointless having two MRNs defined in the North.

The Government has identified the need for a strong regional focus for investment planning and is therefore proposing that local authorities work in partnership with emerging Sub-national Transport Bodies. Transport for the North will therefore take responsibility for developing a Regional Evidence Base to inform development of the national investment programme. The DfT will provide guidance to STBs and partners on how to develop their evidence base. It is essential that Regional Evidence Bases take account of spatial plans within their areas, as spatial plans will be a significant determinant of future network demand. This will be of particular importance with regard to future housing delivery. Local authorities will submit schemes for initial assessment and prioritisation at a regional level, with a coherent regional package then developed for submission to the DfT. Schemes can be at an early stage of development, broadly Strategic Outline Business Case.

The DfT does not intend replacing existing block funding streams for highway maintenance or integrated transport, which local authorities may continue to direct to any of their roads, including those in the MRN. Funding to improve and enhance the MRN will focus on significant interventions, hence the DfT expects to consider contributions of £20m or over and that most funding requests should not exceed £50m. Where a strong case for intervention exists, the DfT would be willing to consider higher contributions, up to a maximum of £100m.

The County Council regards this upper threshold as too low. The two largest major schemes in Lancashire in recent years, the Heysham to M6 Link Road opened in October 2016 and the Preston Western Distributor due to start construction in late 2019, have outturn prices of circa £150m. Likewise, the DfT should consider a lower cost threshold for major structural renewals, as it is difficult to envisage many such schemes costing in excess of £20m, unless part of a package of interventions.

The following types of scheme will be eligible:

- Bypasses or other new alignments to alleviate congestion in villages and towns;
- Missing links, for example, completion of ring roads;
- Widening of existing MRN roads, where there is a known congestion pinch point or safety risk;
- Major structural renewals on roads, bridges, tunnels and viaducts, for example, to prevent closure or punitive weight restrictions;
- Major junction improvements such as grade separation that would improve the performance, flow or safety of the MRN;
- Variable Message Signs, traffic management and the use of Smart Technology and data to raise the performance of defined stretches of the MRN; and

- Packages of improvements along a stretch of road or corridor that may include elements of safety, widening, junction improvements and new alignment. Such packages must demonstrate a compelling and coherent strategic case that is greater than the sum of its parts.

The County Council recommends that packages of improvements along a particular stretch of road or corridor should also include major structural renewals.

MRN funding will not be available to improve roads with a single MRN connection or schemes wholly on the Strategic Road Network unless there is a compelling sub-national case for intervention that would not warrant consideration through the Road Investment Strategy (RIS) process. Public transport enhancements, except where included as part of a wider intervention and shown to support MRN objectives, or non-specific packages of general improvement to all MRN roads in an area, will not be eligible.

### **Consultations**

Lancashire Highways and Asset Management.

### **Implications:**

This item has the following implications, as indicated:

### **Risk management**

If the County Council does not submit a response, it will forgo the opportunity to influence the Government's thinking about the definition of the Major Road Network and the process leading to a programme of major investment in local authority roads.

### **List of Background Papers**

Paper	Date	Contact/Tel
-------	------	-------------

None		
------	--	--

Reason for inclusion in Part II, if appropriate		
---	--	--

N/A		
-----	--	--