

Committee	Cabinet
Date	8 June 2004
Report By	Director of Transport and Environment
Title of Report	Bexhill & Hastings Link Road : Selection of Preferred Route
Purpose of Report	To select a preferred route, next best and cheaper options for the proposed Bexhill & Hastings link road to form the basis of a major scheme funding bid to the Government Office for the South East

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Cabinet is recommended to:

- 1. approve the modified blue (option 1) route as the preferred route, and the modified blue (option 2) route and modified brown route as alternative options to form the basis of a major scheme funding bid to the Government Office for the South East; and**
 - 2. authorise the Director of Transport & Environment to refine these routes and develop schemes for environmental mitigation in liaison with the Statutory Environmental Bodies; and**
 - 3. authorise the Director of Transport & Environment in consultation with the Lead Member for Transport & Environment Department to consider funding options and, if identified, to commission survey work to inform stage 2 of the scheme development in advance of preliminary approval from the Government Office.**
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1. Financial Appraisal

1.1 On 23 September 2003 the Cabinet approved the allocation of £0.3m from the Capital Reserve to develop and submit a bid for the Bexhill and Hastings Link Road. A further £0.2m contribution is being provided by South East England Development Agency (SEEDA) bringing total funding for the preliminary design and bid development work to £0.5m. This excludes staff time which is being met from existing budget provisions.

1.2 It had been anticipated that, if successful, the Government Office for the South East (GOSE) would retrospectively provide supported borrowing approvals for 60% of the total sum above including staff time. However, new guidance issued by GOSE in May 2004 limits financial support from Government to expenditure incurred after the approval of a preferred route by the Authority. At this stage the County Councils Capital Programme does not assume any supported borrowing. The recently issued guidance is available in the Members' room.

1.3 In order to continue to progress the scheme following submission of the bid in July 2004, further funding estimated at £511,000 (Appendix 1) will need to be identified to maintain momentum. Until the bid is approved there will remain an element of financial risk. More significantly there are some activities which will not attract financial support and these are set out, with approximate timings in Appendix 1, most notably the costs of the Public Inquiry and potential Blight Notices which remain the responsibility of the Council until full approval to the scheme is given.

2. Supporting Information

2.1 The County Council was asked by the Secretary of State for Transport to prepare this link road project, following consultation on the South Coast Multi-Modal Study.

2.2 The background to this project is summarised in Appendix 2 culminating with the development of six alternative route options for a link road across the Combe Haven valley in partnership with the Rother District Council (RDC) and Hastings Borough Council (HDC) and in liaison with the Statutory Environmental Bodies (SEBs); English Nature, the Environment Agency, English Heritage and the Countryside Agency for public consultation, see attached plan at Appendix 3.

3. Consultation

3.1 A comprehensive public and stakeholder consultation was undertaken to establish community feeling about the principle of the link road and the findings of that consultation are summarised in Appendix 4.

4. Environmental Issues

4.1 The environmental considerations taken into account in the development of the link road route options were outlined in literature available at the public exhibition. A copy is available in the members' room and is summarised at Appendix 5.

4.2 Given the sensitive nature of the natural environment through which the route options pass it was important that the options were developed to manage the environmental impacts. This work was steered by a group comprising nominees of the SEBs, HDC, RDC and SEEDA. Further refinements to the preferred routes will similarly be steered by this group.

5. Economic Impact

5.1 The Link Road is seen as a crucial component of the £400 million regeneration plan for Hastings and Bexhill and its contribution to securing local economic vitality is summarised in Appendix 6. This does not just provide a link for existing traffic but opens up housing and employment development land, crucial to meet the wider needs of the community.

6. Route Development

6.1 The ongoing work with the SEBs and qualitative findings emerging from the public consultation have helped develop refinements to some of the route options to minimise the environmental impact and allow other related benefits to be achieved. These are outlined in Appendix 7.

7. Route Option Assessment

7.1 The route options are being assessed by comparing their relative performance under the following categories: Environment, Safety, Economy, Accessibility, Integration, Cost, Public Support and SEBs Support. Using this framework, which reflects that for scheme selection used by the Department for Transport, the blue route emerges as a clear favourite. This comparison is summarised at Appendix 8 and the appraisal summary tables are available in the members' room.

8. Conclusion and Reason for Recommendation

8.1 The route assessments and option refinement establish a modified blue (option 1) route as the route which best satisfies the brief given to the County Council by the Secretary of State for Transport in his decision on the South Coast Multi Modal Study, with the modified blue (option 2) route and modified brown routes as alternative options which could also satisfy the brief. These are shown on Appendix 9. Therefore it is proposed that those options form the basis of a major scheme bid for the implementation of this project. The physical description of the preferred route is included at Appendix 10. If the County Council and its parties wish to avoid a 12 month delay to the project it is necessary to commission further wildlife and archaeological surveys in advance of preliminary approval of the scheme by GOSE with a financial risk of £511,000 as detailed in Appendix 1 if the bid is ultimately unsuccessful.

BOB WILKINS, Director of Transport and Environment
03 June 2004 Cabinet: 8 June – BHLR

Contact Officer: Peter Hayward - Tel. No. 01273 482136
Local Members: Councillors Field, Mrs Hopkinson, Bridger, Scott and Mrs Waite

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Access to Hastings Multi Modal Study; & South Coast Multi Modal Study and Minister's Decision Letter.

ESTIMATE CAVEATS

Prices at 2004 (Q1) costs levels – based on feasibility design

The cost for the following are 'best guess' estimates at this time:

- Landscaping - includes greenway construction and accommodation bridges
- Statutory Undertakers Plant Diversions - The cost for diversion of Gas and Foul Sewers at Wiltings Farm is included in the above table at an estimated cost of £1m. Although that estimated cost for the diversion could vary depending on the junction configuration adopted.

In addition there are significant cost risks with regard to the following items:

- Network Rail Approval
- Hydrology of flood plain and obtaining EA approval
- Dealing with Egerton Stream

Detailed design and supervision taken at 6% of construction cost
Contingencies are approx 7% of scheme estimate

Bexhill – Hastings Link Road

Background Summary

1. In response to the South Coast Multi-Modal Study (SoCoMMS), the Secretary of State for Transport has asked East Sussex County Council (ESCC) to develop a preferred route for the Bexhill-Hastings Link Road (BHLR) in liaison with the Statutory Environmental Bodies (SEBs); English Nature, the Environment Agency, English Heritage and the Countryside Agency to minimise the environmental impact.
2. The main purpose of the road is to provide a second road link between Bexhill and Hastings, from the A259 at Bexhill to Queensway on the Western fringe of Hastings (and ultimately to the A21). Forming part of an integrated package of transport measures underpinning the Bexhill & Hastings 5 point plan, this will help to unlock major housing and business allocations, assist local economic regeneration and development and contribute to resolving congestion and air quality issues arising at Glyne Gap. Public transport and cycling enhancements are expressly sought, looking both at the design of the road link but more particularly at the intermediate junctions and termination points. The ability of the BHLR to meet the aims and objectives of the County's Structure Plan, Local Transport Plan (LTP) and relevant national targets, and its place within the County's overall strategic road network are fundamental.
3. Public Transport enhancement continues to be a key objective for the two towns, as expressed through the Urban Bus Challenge project and the Quality Bus Partnership involving a local bus operator and the respective Councils. The BHLR will provide substantial public transport opportunities both in its own capacity and in the additional capacity freed up on existing routes, which will be developed in parallel.
4. Six alternative route options for the link road across the Combe Haven valley were developed in partnership with the South East England Development Agency (SEEDA), Rother District Council (RDC) and Hastings Borough Council (HDC) and in liaison with the SEBs for public consultation, see attached plan at appendix 3.

Bexhill – Hasting Link Road

Consultation Summary

1. A tabloid was circulated to 65000 addresses in the environs of Bexhill, Hastings and Crowhurst which detailed the options, sought views via a questionnaire and invited the public to attend an exhibition. A copy of that tabloid is available in the members' room. The exhibition provided more detail about each route option and gave opportunity to raise specific questions with officers. That exhibition visited 7 different venues in Bexhill and Hastings during February 2004 and was attended by more than 4000 individuals.
2. 2558 questionnaires were received during the consultation period of which 84% supported the principle of developing a link road. Those who responded were clear that the orange and blue routes were their most favoured options. 37% of first choice votes were for orange and 24% for blue because they would reduce traffic on the busy A259. Out of these two routes, people felt the blue route would have the least impact on the environment and the natural landscape.
3. The remaining 39% of support was split between the red, brown, purple and pink routes in that order. The pink route got the least support because people felt it would not deal with the problem of congestion and was too close to residential areas. The red route at £140million was thought to be too expensive.
4. Nearly half of all respondents wanted to see more investment in roads as a priority, followed by more investment in trains (20%) and buses (19%). Three quarters of respondents were keen to see the Highways Agency build a link between the A21 and Queensway.
5. In addition, a number of alternative options and specific issues were raised at the public consultation. These included the potential of a route closer to the existing residential areas to minimise impact on the countryside and the impact of the routes on the setting of Adams Farm and Upper Wilting Farm, which are listed buildings.
6. A more local consultation was carried out independently by an action group in Crowhurst. That exercise elicited 86 responses and did not change the overall ranking of the individual routes. Whilst only 8 responses indicated opposition to the principle of a link road a significant minority expressed concern about a potential increase in 'rat running' traffic, the impact of the road on flooding issues and increasing noise and pollution locally to the village.
7. The detailed analysis of the returned questionnaires and summary of the local consultation in Crowhurst is available in the members room, together with a summary of common questions and respective responses which emerged both at the exhibition and in the replies to the consultation.
8. The views of SEEDA, RDC, HDC and the SEBs were expressly sought as a part of the consultation to inform subsequent design stages. These are summarised overleaf:
9. The Hastings and Bexhill Task Force commented that the road is an important component under the Transport theme of the Five Point Plan. It therefore strongly supports the principle of the Link Road. It gives support to the Blue Route as its preferred one as it is reasonably direct, appears capable of being fitted within the landscape without the degree of intrusion of most other options. It stresses the importance of working in concert with the Country Park and that the road would form a useful northern boundary to the Park.
10. Rother District Council strongly supports the principle of the Link Road and the Bexhill Connection and their earliest implementation. The Council has a clear preference for Blue Route, which should be considered as part of a new local transport "package" with

other transport modes. The Council also wished the County Council to pursue adequate junction arrangements at Sidley and the Highways Agency to bring forward the link to the A21 without impinging on the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

11. Hastings Borough Council strongly welcomes the Link Road and supports the Blue Route and resolved that the four southern most routes should be opposed. The council considers that the A21- Queensway Link must be constructed at the same time as the Link Road. The County Council was also asked to consider constructing the road as a dual carriageway; to study the effects of the Link Road upon secondary road networks and to take care to address severance and viability issues at Upper Wilting Farm, in the Council's ownership.

12. The Pebsham Country Park Steering Group has expressed a preference for Red or Blue routes which do not have the direct impact which the other routes have upon the future development of the Country Park. The Group has particular concern that cycling, walking and horse riding facilities are incorporated into the scheme and severance of public paths is avoided. A willingness to work with the Highway Authority was expressed, to identify opportunities for the joint planning of road and its mitigation or compensation, with proposals for the Park.

13. The Countryside Agency has highlighted the view that the whole area is attractive countryside and environmentally important. However, its view is that whilst the red route is the closest to the AONB it appears to offer the best opportunities to minimise the visual and noise impacts of the road upon nearby designated landscape of national importance. The Agency considers that a single carriageway solution would be essential.

14. English Nature considers that only Red or Blue Routes are potentially acceptable. These do not sever the Combe Haven SSSI and avoid ancient woodlands and Sites of Nature Conservation Importance. English Nature can not support Pink, Orange, Purple or Brown Routes.

15. English Heritage agrees with the Council's consultants, that the area contains a rich and diverse historic environment. Purple and Pink Routes are not favoured. Routes which cross the floor of the Combe Haven Valley are likely to impact on areas of regionally or nationally important archaeology. Red route offers some reduced impact upon the archaeology of the valley sides using tunnels and Brown and Blue offer some opportunity for mitigation of visual impact. There is concern about the impact on listed buildings at Adams Farm and Upper Wilting Farm and measures to relieve this should be considered. The impact on the cultural landscape is complex and no clear preference is expressed albeit that English Heritage generally agrees with the Council's consultants who generally favour Blue or Red Routes.

16. The Environment Agency would strongly object to any planning application for Orange, Purple or Pink Routes because of the impact upon the Combe Haven floodplain, SSSI and Local Nature Reserve. It would also object to the Brown Route as it affects the SSSI and floodplain. Although the Agency has not expressed a route preference, Red or Blue Routes appear to have less impact than other routes. The Agency has drawn the Council's attention to the need to address flooding and impact upon water courses in its road design. Further discussions with the Agency have been very constructive and there is a high degree of confidence that its requirement can be met in the Blue or Red Routes.

Bexhill – Hastings Link Road

Environmental Issues

General

The Combe Haven Valley is probably the finest medium sized valley in East Sussex, outside of Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. It is set within a high quality landscape of historic and wildlife interest and contains peaceful and remote countryside.

The Valley and its hinterland should be seen as part of the Weald where people have lived and worked for thousands of years.

It is important to find a balanced and integrated way forward to conserve and enhance the environment of the County as a whole, for all its residents to enjoy.

Within the High Weald countryside are many minor roads through villages that are also harmed by heavy traffic, which short cuts through the area. It is important to relieve these roads of traffic to ease the resulting damaging environmental effects upon nationally important countryside and those who live in it.

In order to help strike an environmental balance in this scheme, the County Council has commissioned a number of studies, to provide more information about the significance of the place. Some of these are ongoing and include, wildlife, archaeology and cultural heritage, noise and air quality, hydrology and landscape.

Wildlife - The area is largely undeveloped with extensive semi-natural habitats, parts of which are known to harbour various protected species including Great Crested Newts, Badgers, Bats, Dormice and various reptiles.

The Valley floor is a nationally important wetland area, designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest. Part of this is a Local Nature Reserve; Filsham Reedbeds - the largest single reed bed in the County.

Woodlands - Most of the woodlands are ancient semi-natural woodlands, which are recognised by English Nature and the Planning Authorities as of major importance and in need of protection.

The Local Planning Authorities have also identified additional areas as **Sites of Nature Conservation Importance**, including much of the disused railway line, Combe Wood and land off Harley Shute Road and at Glyne Gap.

In addition there are many other valuable areas that carry no formal designation.

Archaeology and Cultural Heritage - Although there are few designated archaeological sites within the valley, it is recognised that, in common with much of East Sussex, the landscape pattern, particularly on the northern valley side, is of historic significance.

The floor of the valley is considered to be of High or Very High Archaeological Potential as a result of the presence of deep alluvial deposits.

The foot-slopes of the valley sides are likely to contain archaeological remains, though these have not yet been specifically identified.

There are a number of listed buildings across the valley. Most of these are farmhouses and their settings are afforded a degree of protection.

Noise and Air Quality - Clearly the urban areas are those currently most affected by noise and poorer air quality. It therefore follows that the open countryside areas may experience more change through new noise and air quality influences.

Most of the valley floor is very quiet in spite of urban areas being quite close by. Western parts of the Combe Haven Valley contain remote areas of landscape. These have low ambient noise levels.

Drainage - The valley floors are important for the storage and passage of floodwater and it is important that any proposals safeguard or enhance the natural drainage.

Farming – The valley owes much of its character to farmers working in harmony with the land and landscape. There are still a number of working farms in the valley. Retaining them is important to the conservation of the character and quality of the valleys.

Landscape - The view of the Combe Haven is one of the most dramatic views in the County. The areas between Harley Shute Road and Actons Farm, Adam's Farm and the Worsham Farm ridge has a strong and distinctive character. This is complemented by the valleys of the Watermill and Powdermill Streams contained by bold ridges.

ROUTE IMPACTS

The dilemmas for planning a road in this landscape are complex. There is no easy or obvious route for a link road between Bexhill and Hastings but there is a need to find a solution which pays due regard to this environment. In developing a balanced approach the benefits to urban and rural communities need to be viewed alongside the impact upon the countryside, whilst considering the opportunities to assist in the creation of the Pebsham Countryside Park as a part of the mitigation for the impact of the road.

Through the central area – Orange and Purple routes, are potentially visible on the Worsham Ridge from the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and they cross the area of very high archaeological potential and national wildlife value.

Southern and Central Routes, orange, purple and pink, are visually intrusive in the views of the Combe Haven Valley and pink has the longest crossing of the SSSI and also crosses the Local Nature Reserve. However, Pink routes does “hug” the urban edge in comparison with the intrusion of the northern routes, Red, Blue and Brown, into quiet unspoilt countryside. Pink therefore has impact upon a greater number of homes than other routes.

The northern routes, Red, Blue and Brown, have greater potential to disrupt the historic landscape pattern, than other routes, but this could be reduced by the use of tunnels on Red route, at dramatically higher capital cost. However, Pink route is likely to cause greater overall damage to our cultural heritage than others.

Red route would not be seen in the main views of Combe Haven valley and the visual impact of Blue and Brown could be significantly mitigated on the edge of the view of the valley.

Countryside Park - There is an outstanding opportunity between Bexhill and St Leonards to create a major Countryside Park, to benefit environmental conservation and recreation. The northern routes, Red, Blue or Brown might help define the northern edge to the Park. The other routes cut across the Park to varying degrees. The Countryside Park offers opportunities to mitigate for the environmental impact of the road and for the location of cycleway/footpaths linked to the existing paths in a comprehensively planned approach to our environment.

Bexhill – Hastings Link Road

Economic Impact

1. The Link Road is seen as a crucial component of the £400 million regeneration plan for Hastings and Bexhill. It will enable the release of much needed land at North Bexhill for employment development. This land could enable development of around ½ million sq.ft. of new business space which could create over 2000 jobs.
2. The employment will be accessible for people in Hastings as well as Bexhill. The Link Road will make it easier to do this both by bus and car. Many people already commute between the two towns – so this is nothing new.
3. The A259 is notoriously congested and unpredictable and makes journey times difficult to plan. This is an impediment to local business activity. The recent *Access To Hastings Study* established that better road linkage between Hastings and Bexhill would significantly help local economic activity.
4. The regeneration proposals for Hastings and Bexhill town centres and elsewhere, will inevitably lead to growth in traffic - both private and public transport. The Link Road will support the proposals by overcoming a critical weakness in the local road infrastructure and, in so doing, aid business confidence to invest in these major new projects.

Bexhill – Hastings Link Road

Post Consultation Route Development

The ongoing work with the SEBs and qualitative findings emerging from the public consultation have helped develop refinements to some of the route options to minimise the environmental impact and allow other related benefits to be achieved. These include:

- Modification to the blue and brown routes to pass to the north of Upper Wilting Farm with a grade separated crossing of Crowhurst Road. This reduces the likelihood of rat running through Crowhurst and reduces the impact of the link road on the setting of Upper Wilting Farm.
- Modification to the blue route to the north of Actons Farm allowing the working farm to be retained intact.
- Modification to the Powdermill stream valley enhancing natural drainage and contributing to the resolution of flooding issues in Crowhurst.
- Reduction in the level of routes and in some cases the types of structures to minimise the visual impact, limit the impact of noise and pollution and reduce the impact of the blue route on the setting of Adams Farm.
- Development of junction types to maximise priority for public transport and improve crossing facilities for pedestrians and cyclists.
- Development of a new (green) route closer to the Bexhill and Hastings built up areas, as proposed by a member of the public, to minimise the incursion into the open countryside, see plan overleaf.

Bexhill – Hastings Link Road
Route Option Comparison Summary

Criteria	Routes						
	Red	Blue	Brown	Orange	Purple	Pink	Green
Environment	X	x	xx	xx	xx	xxx	xxx
Safety	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓	✓
Economy	-	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓	✓
Accessibility	✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓	✓	✓✓	✓✓
Integration	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓	✓	✓	✓✓	✓✓
Cost	xxx	✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓	x	-
Public Support	✓	✓✓	-	✓✓✓	x	xx	xxx
SEB's	✓✓	✓✓✓	xx	xxx	xxx	xxx	xxx
Totals	6	16	8	7	2	-3	-3

Detailed Appraisal Summary Tables (ASTs) for each route option are available in the members room.

Bexhill – Hastings Link Road

Physical Description of Preferred Route

The proposed route starts on the A259 trunk road at the Belle Hill/London Road junction, where an enhanced signal controlled junction will separate east and north east bound traffic. A further signal controlled junction just north of the A259 will facilitate access to and from the London Road to Sidley.

The route is along the bed of an old railway line as it passes through the built-up area as a conventional single carriageway road. From the edge of the town it emerges into open countryside as a wide single carriageway.

The route runs downhill almost due north from Sidley and passes to the west of the main Combe Haven valley avoiding the Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). It crosses the Combe Haven Valley on embankment at just above the flood level and passes into cutting to the west of Acton's Farm. As it turns eastwards to the north of Acton's Farm, it is sensitively routed to minimize the impact on farms, and the open valley landscape of the Combe Haven.

The route then crosses the valley of the Watermill Stream on embankment at just above flood level. New wet woodland, reed beds and embankment planting will help to integrate the road into this fine landscape. The road cuts through the southern end of the Hillcroft ridge such that an accommodation access bridge can be constructed over the road with minimal visual impact.

The route then crosses the valley of the Powdermill Stream on embankment at just above flood level as it continues its passage eastwards and to the north of the Combe Haven SSSI.

The setting of a listed building at Adams Farm will be significantly affected by the route and earthworks and planting will be used to minimise that impact. It passes in cutting to the south east of Adams Farm such that the road and traffic will be largely hidden at this point.

The road emerges from this cutting onto an embankment across the valley of the Decoy Stream, north of Decoy Pond Wood and the Combe Haven SSSI. It will just avoid an old pond to the north of the wood before entering another cutting at it climbs to the north of Upper Wilting Farm. This is a listed building and by passing to the north of the farm it will minimize impact upon its setting.

The route crosses over Crowhurst Road with no junction and then crosses the valley and railway line to the east on a large embankment which will be planted with new woodland. The Marline Valley Woods SSSI lies just to the north of the route. This is also ancient semi natural woodland and a Local Nature Reserve. The embankments for the road will avoid direct impact upon these designated areas.

The route terminates with a signal controlled junction at Queensway. All the signal controlled junctions will include bus priority measures.

None of the route has a direct impact upon the Combe Haven SSSI or the Marline Valley Woods SSSI and measures will be taken to minimise secondary impact. A considerable amount of work will be done to provide landscape and wildlife mitigation and compensation in the design of the road and drainage measures. These will complement and enhance the value of the SSSI and the Pebsham Country Park. The length of the link road would be [5.58 kilometres (3.47 miles)] and will be of wide single carriageway standard with the national speed limit.

The road route is seen as a part of a "green" access corridor between Bexhill and Hastings and will be accompanied by a greenway to accommodate cycling, walking and horse riding.

This is designed as a fenced and gated 10m wide strip with 3m metalled cycleway/ footpath and a 3m soft horse track plus safety margins. In places this will need to be widened to accommodate farm traffic and Environment Agency maintenance vehicles.

The greenway is mainly on the south side of the road and designed as a shared facility with the Pebsham Country Park. As such, in places it coincides with public rights of way and links with other rights of way on either side of the road. The "green" access corridor varies in width according to the needs of road, the greenway and environmental mitigation measures. The greenway is usually, but not always, alongside the road structures. It is designed to be an attractive and safe route for utility cycling and recreation.