

14 JANUARY, 2020

M6 Junction 10 Major Transport Scheme – Progress Update

Ward(s): Bentley & Darlaston North, Birchills – Leamore

Portfolios: Councillor Adrian Andrew, Deputy Leader and Regeneration

1. Aim

- 1.1. A major transport scheme has been developed for M6 Junction 10 (M6 J10) to address traffic congestion at this key location on the local and strategic highway networks; open-up access to nearby employment growth sites around the junction in the Black Country Enterprise Zone; and replace the life-expired bridges with two new bridges of sufficient width to carry four lanes of traffic over the motorway. The scheme is designed to support the Walsall economy, and underpin the wider regeneration of the Borough.
- 1.2. This report presents the Committee with an update on project progress and information about construction timelines, which will commence later in the year.

2. Report detail - know

- 2.1. Walsall Council is working in partnership with Highways England to deliver a major 'congestion-busting' improvement at M6 J10, with construction starting later in the year.
- 2.2. The junction is of strategic importance within the Black Country and the wider West Midlands, and sits on the busy A454 Black Country Route between Walsall and Wolverhampton. The junction is currently carrying significantly more traffic than it was ever designed for and is often heavily congested, which is why the scheme is so badly needed.
- 2.3. The major improvements, supported with funding from Highways England, Department for Transport, Black Country Local Enterprise Partnership and Walsall Council, are designed to: -

Provide a freer flowing network by:

- reducing congestion on the Black Country Route (A454) and other roads linking to the junction
- reducing 'rat-running' traffic on nearby routes
- reducing queuing on the motorway slip roads

Support economic growth and regeneration by:

- improving access to the strategic road network
- attracting new business and development to the area

- improving links to Walsall development sites given Enterprise Zone status (applicable 1 April 2013 – 31 March 2038)

Provide a safe and maintainable network by:

- replacing the bridge structures at the junction, avoiding major maintenance work in the near future
- improving conditions for cyclists, pedestrians and other non-motorised users at the junction

2.4. The scheme is currently in Stage 5 of the project lifecycle (construction preparation / detailed design stage) and is due to be delivered from summer 2020 to 2022.

2.5. Key project milestones that have already been achieved include: -

Milestone	Achieved (Date)
Planning Permission obtained	May 2018
Delivery Agreement finalised	September 2018
Statutory Orders published	September 2018
Local Public Inquiry completed	April 2019
Funding (Highways England) approved	June 2019
Statutory Orders confirmed by Secretary of State	July 2019
Contractor appointed (John Sisk & Son Ltd)	July 2019
Funding (DfT / BCLEP) approved	September 2019
Pre-Construction commenced	November 2019

2.6. Public consultation events and public information events have taken place throughout the project lifecycle. Consultation was undertaken in December 2015; statutory consultation was undertaken on the planning application in January 2017; and information events about the statutory orders were undertaken in September 2018. In addition, local businesses have been engaged to inform them of progress, and a major campaign will get underway in the spring with support from Transport for West Midlands to help local people and employers be aware of the works; think about alternative routes; be aware of alternative travel modes (bus, walk and cycle); consider whether some journeys could be avoided altogether; and to encourage people to stay engaged with the project and plan ahead accordingly.

2.7. A separate (but related) project to create an alternative route for pedestrians and cyclists (called 'Connecting Bentley') is also currently being delivered along Bloxwich Lane, Churchill Road and Queen Elizabeth Avenue, in order to provide a safe route around the junction when the main construction works are being delivered. This project is currently being delivered by Walsall Council, funded from Highways England's 'Designated Funds' programme, and will be complete by the end of March 2020.

2.8. In late-January / early-February 2020 further 'start of works' exhibitions will take place to inform people of the proposed construction programme and what to expect in terms of traffic management and associated disruption. These will be run at local venues and will be open so that people can drop-in on a weekday daytime, weekday evening and weekend daytime to find out more about the scheme.

2.9. Advance works are already underway. Site works that have recently taken place or are ongoing include: -

- Setting up of temporary compound to the rear of the Village Hotel
- Limited daytime site clearance to defined locations to allow additional surveys e.g. topographical survey
- Localised initial night-time traffic management to allow surveys and limited site clearance

2.10. Development and agreement of the full construction programme is ongoing between Highways England and their contractor, John Sisk & Son Ltd. The indicative programme is as follows: -

Activity	Date(s)
Advanced Works (surveys, site clearance, temporary works, temporary accesses, mine probing, grouting)	November 2019 – May 2020
Detailed Design Finalised	July 2020
Commence Main Construction Works	July 2020
Black Country Route Central Reserve	July 2020 – September 2020
Structures Piling Works, Retaining Wall Works; Slip Roads Earthworks and Road Widening Works; Bridge Structures Works	July 2020 – August 2021
Bloxwich Lane Junction	January 2021 – July 2021
Final Interchange Works, Gantry Works, Telecommunications Works	April 2021 – September 2021
Final Surfacing and Landscaping	July 2021 – September 2021
Commissioning and Handover	August 2021 – October 2021
Planned Construction Completion	October 2021
Aftercare and Maintenance	2 years duration

Financial information

2.11. The project budget is £78m, with 50% of the scheme funded by Highways England. The remainder is funded from a mix of Black Country LEP funds (£29m DfT retained fund and £8m competitive funds), with Walsall Council covering the balance.

2.12. The project budget contains appropriate contingencies and risk allowances, which will cover exposures as set out in the scheme's risk register.

2.13. As the scheme develops, project forecasts will be monitored on an ongoing basis to ensure that the Black Country LEP time-limited grants can be fully drawn down by the March 2021 deadline.

Reducing Inequalities

2.14. Highways England, and their contractor, are committed to addressing and reducing inequalities through the delivery of this project.

2.15. Highways England with John Sisk have developed an Equality Impact Assessment report to support Highways England in meeting its statutory requirements under the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED), as set out in the Equality Act 2010, to support good decision-making and to ensure that the scheme meets the needs of all users of the road network and of local communities.

3. Decide - Recommendations

- 3.1 That, the Committee note the contents of the report;
- 3.2 Agree to receive further progress updates, with the next update before the main construction works commence in summer 2020.

4. Respond

- 4.1. Whilst the delivery of the project falls to Highways England and their contractor, Walsall Council is joint-promoting and joint-funding the project and is committed to ensuring that the impacts on local residents, businesses, commuters and other stakeholders is kept to a minimum. The way this will be achieved will be through the direct involvement of Council officers in overseeing the delivery of the works; discharge of the planning conditions; and project governance.
- 4.2. The Council has been working with Highways England (previously Highways Agency) since 2012 on the project and will continue to participate fully in the ongoing development and delivery of the project.

5. Review

- 5.1. Throughout the delivery phase of the project, Walsall Council, Highways England and John Sisk & Son Ltd will continue to engage with local residents, businesses and other stakeholders through various forums, including start of works exhibitions; website updates; targeted letter drops (for directly affected property owners and tenants); e-mail; and social media. The project partners will respond to stakeholders' issues and concerns, seeking to ensure that the project is delivered as quickly and efficiently as possible.
- 5.2. The main points of contact for the project will be: -
 - David Reed – Highways England Project Manager (tel. 0300 470 3321)
 - James Keogh – John Sisk Senior Project Manager (tel. 07827 354 895)
 - Dan Johnson – Walsall Council – Lead Engineer (tel. 01922 655 926)

Background papers

None.

Author

Matthew Crowton
Transportation Major Projects & Strategy Manager
☎ 654358
✉ matt.crowton@walsall.gov.uk