

18 NOVEMBER, 2021

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 is being delivered at 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 the remaining construction timeline.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1. The Committee is recommended to: -
 - Note the contents of the report;
 - Agree to receive a final progress update before the main construction phase concludes in spring 2022.

3. Report detail - know

- 3.1. Walsall Council is working in partnership with National Highways and their appointed contractor (John Sisk & Son Ltd) to deliver a major ‘congestion-busting’ improvement at M6 J10.
- 3.2. 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 existing junction carries significantly more traffic than it was ever designed for and is often heavily congested, which is why the scheme is so badly needed.
- 3.3. The major improvements, supported with funding from National Highways, Department for Transport, Black Country Local Enterprise Partnership and Walsall Council, are designed to: -

- Provide a freer flowing network
 - 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
 - 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
 - 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

3.4. The scheme is currently in Stage 6 of the project lifecycle (construction, commissioning and handover) and is due to be delivered by spring 2022.

3.5. 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
'Start of Works' Exhibition	January 2020
Commencement of Advanced Works	February 2020
Start of Main Construction Phase	August 2020
Installation of North Bridge Beams & Deck	August 2021
Installation of South Bridge Beams & Deck	September 2021

3.6. 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, utilising 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.

3.7. A separate (but related) project to create an alternative route for pedestrians and cyclists (called 'Connecting Bentley') has been delivered along Bloxwich Lane, Churchill Road and Queen Elizabeth Avenue, in order to provide a safe route around

the junction following the commencement of the main construction phase. This project was delivered by Walsall Council, funded by National Highways' 'Designated Funds' programme, and was completed in March 2020. A complementary scheme 'Connecting Bentley II' is currently being delivered as part of the Council's Active Travel Fund programme.

3.8. A 'start of works' exhibition was held at the Village Hotel in January 2020 to inform people of the proposed construction programme and what to expect in terms of traffic management and associated disruption.

3.9. Advanced works were completed between February and August 2020 including:-

- Setting up of the site compound and offices on the site of the John Hill and Sons, Wolverhampton Road
- Probe drilling for (and treatment of) mineshafts and mine workings located within the scheme footprint
- Site clearance works
- Commencement of the temporary works phase
- Creation of new works accesses to allow off-line working
- Additional surveys e.g. topographical / ground probing radar
- Approval of the detailed design

3.10. Following the commencement of the main construction phase in August 2020 the steel beams for the new north and south bridges were installed in August 2021 and September 2021 respectively. These activities took place utilising a full closure of the M6 with traffic diverted up and over the junction via the slip roads.

3.11. The full construction programme is as follows: -

Activity	Date(s)
Advanced Works	February 2020 – August 2020
Commencement of Main Construction Works	August 2020
Structures Piling Works, Retaining Wall Works; Slip Roads Earthworks and Road Widening Works	July 2020 – October 2021
Bridges Structures Works <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • North Bridge Beam Lift • South Bridge Beam Lift 	August 2021 September 2021
Final Interchange Works, Gantry Works, Telecommunications Works	April 2021 – December 2021
Final Surfacing and Landscaping	July 2021 – March 2022
De-commissioning of x2 existing bridges	May 2022
Commissioning and Handover	March 2022 – May 2022
Planned Construction Completion	May 2022
Aftercare and Maintenance	2 years duration

3.12. The decommissioning of the two existing bridges will take place in two separate closures in May 2022, and will make use of the same temporary traffic management arrangements used in the bridge beam lifts in summer 2021.

4. Financial Information

- 4.1. The project budget is £78m, with 50% of the scheme funded by National Highways. 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.
- 4.2. The project budget contains appropriate contingencies and risk allowances, which will mitigate against risk exposures as set out in the scheme's risk register.
- 4.3. Project forecasts were monitored on an ongoing basis to ensure that the Black Country LEP time-limited grants were fully drawn down by the required (March 2021) deadline.

5. Reducing Inequalities

- 5.1. National Highways, and their contractor, are committed to addressing and reducing inequalities through the delivery of this project.
- 5.2. National Highways with John Sisk & Son Ltd have developed an Equality Impact Assessment report to support National Highways 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

6. Decide

- 6.1. The Committee is asked should consider the content of this report, and in conjunction with any feedback received to date from affected stakeholders, should consider what response to be made to the portfolio holder and officers.

7. Respond

- 7.1. Whilst the delivery of the project falls to National Highways 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. This is being achieved by the direct involvement of Council officers in overseeing the delivery of the works; discharge of the planning conditions; and project governance.
- 7.2. The Council has been working with National Highways (previously Highways England) since 2012 on the project and will continue to participate fully in the ongoing development and delivery of the project.

8. Review

- 8.1. Throughout the remainder of the delivery phase of the project, Walsall Council, National Highways and John Sisk & Son Ltd will continue to engage with local residents, businesses and other stakeholders through various forums; website updates; targeted letter drops (for directly affected property owners and tenants); e-mail; and social media. The project partners will continue to respond to stakeholders' issues and concerns, seeking to ensure that the project is delivered as quickly and efficiently as possible.
- 8.2. The main points of contact for the project are: -

- Annie Hyett – National Highways Project Manager (tel. 07591 987360)
- James Keogh – John Sisk Senior Project Manager (tel. 07827 354 895)
- Dan Johnson – Walsall Council Lead Engineer (tel. 07939 647124)

Background papers

None.

Author

Matthew Crowton
Transportation Major Projects & Strategy Manager

☎ 01922 654358

✉ matt.crowton@walsall.gov.uk