

Meeting date: 29 November 2018
Report to: Cabinet Portfolio Holder – Transport & Highways



Subject/report title: A45 Sprint Consultation – Solihull MBC Response
Report from: Assistant Director for Growth & Development
Report author/lead contact officer: Walter Bailey – Group Manager - Transport & Infrastructure Commissioning

Wards affected:

- All Wards | Bickenhill | Blythe | Castle Bromwich | Chelmsley Wood |
 Dorridge/Hockley Heath | Elmdon | Kingshurst/Fordbridge | Knowle |
 Lyndon | Meriden | Olton | Shirley East | Shirley South |
 Shirley West | Silhill | Smith's Wood | St Alphege

Public/private report: Public

Exempt by virtue of paragraph: N/A

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To consider the Solihull MBC Technical Response to the recent consultation on Transport for West Midlands' A45 Sprint proposal, and to seek agreement to delegate approval powers in relation to technical matters that remain outstanding.

2. Decision(s) recommended

- 2.1 Cabinet Member is asked to:
- a) Consider the Solihull MBC Technical Response to the A45 Sprint consultation (as included at Appendix A);
 - b) Support the A45 Sprint proposal, subject to satisfactory resolution of the outstanding technical matters set out in the consultation response (Appendix A, Items 1 – 15); and
 - c) Approve that 'Delegated Authority' be granted to the Assistant Director – Highways & Environment, in consultation with the Cabinet Portfolio Holder – Transport & Highways, to secure satisfactory resolution of those outstanding technical matters.

3. What is the issue?

Background

- 3.1 'Sprint' is a form of Bus Rapid Transport, proposed by Transport for West Midlands (TfWM), which is intended to achieve a step-change in bus provision across the region. This will be achieved through the provision of a high quality service that provides users with an on-board experience that is similar to that of a tram; delivered alongside a range of highway priority measures and bus lanes to deliver significant reductions in journey times. Further information Sprint, as a concept, is available at the link below:

<https://www.tfwm.org.uk/development/sprint/>

- 3.2 Although TfWM has recently conducted its first detailed consultation relating to Sprint in Solihull, the concept of Sprint, and the intent for it to be delivered across the West Midlands, is not new.

HS2 Growth Strategy

- 3.3 In 2015, the Greater Birmingham and Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership (GBSLEP) published its HS2 Growth Strategy and associated HS2 Connectivity Package, which set out the region's intent to capitalise upon the arrival of HS2 within the West Midlands and has since been adopted by the West Midlands Combined Authority. The Strategy focusses on the regional and local benefits that will be generated by being better connected to the rest of the UK; it details plans for significant growth and development around the HS2 Interchange and Curzon Street stations, and proposes a range of infrastructure measures required to ensure that people across the West Midlands will be able to access the new jobs and homes created in such areas. Also included in the Growth Strategy is a specific skills package to ensure that people are sufficiently skilled to capture HS2-related job opportunities, and a package to ensure that the local supply chain is able to capitalise upon the opportunities presented by the construction of HS2.
- 3.4 The HS2 Connectivity Package set out the public transport measures considered necessary to better access HS2 by public transport, and to establish the basis for sustainably accessible growth around its stations. The Package included a wide range of prioritised measures that improved access across the region as a whole; however, since submission of the Growth Strategy, further sifting has been undertaken by the West Midlands Combined Authority, which has identified the following schemes as being required within Solihull:
- A45 Sprint – between the City Centre and Birmingham Airport / Solihull Town Centre;
 - Hall Green Sprint – which will connect Hall Green with the HS2 Interchange Station via Solihull Town Centre and Shirley; and
 - East Birmingham and North Solihull Metro – connecting the HS2 Interchange Station with the City Centre via Chelmsley Wood and Bordesley Green.

3.5 The three schemes highlighted above have secured development funding from the West Midlands Combined Authority through the Mayoral Devolution Deal. Funding to deliver the schemes will need to be secured following the production of relevant Business Cases.

3.6 The HS2 Growth Strategy and Connectivity Package can be viewed via the links below:

<https://gbslep.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/HS2-GS-FINAL.pdf>

<https://www.tfwm.org.uk/media/1102/hs2-connectivity-package.pdf>

The UK Central 'Hub' / Arden Cross

3.7 In 2013, Solihull MBC published its 'M42 Economic Gateway' Study, which set out the Council's ambitions for economic growth along the M42 corridor, at a time when the likelihood of HS2 delivery was far from certain. Since its publication, and as HS2 has become more certain, the Council has concentrated on further defining its ambitions for growth as part of its UK Central vision.

3.8 The Council's UK Central programme sets out, and seeks to enable the delivery of, the measures necessary to deliver managed growth in four areas across the Borough:

- Zone 1 – 'The Hub'; including the HS2 Interchange Station, Birmingham Airport, NEC, Jaguar Land Rover and Birmingham Airport;
- Zone 2 – North Solihull
- Zone 3 – Solihull Town Centre; and
- Zone 4 – Blythe Valley Business Park.

3.9 As a result of the need to inform discussions and negotiation with HS2 regarding the delivery of rail infrastructure, and to feed into the HS2 Growth Strategy, the Council has undertaken a significant amount of work in defining the growth potential of UKC Zone 1 – The Hub; work undertaken both by the Council and, latterly, by its Urban Growth Company.

3.10 The Urban Growth Company (UGC) is a special purpose delivery vehicle, established with the primary aim of developing an understanding of the growth potential of The Hub area and identifying, and enabling the delivery of, the infrastructure measures necessary to maximise that growth potential.

3.11 Accordingly, the UGC has identified the need for improved public transport access to, from and within The Hub in its published 'Growth and Infrastructure Plan' and 'Hub Development Framework'; available at the link below:

<https://www.ugcsolihull.uk/publications/>

3.12 The scale of growth envisaged at The Hub is such that access by high quality public transport is paramount. The Council will not achieve its ambition for managed growth without improvement to public transport access – the environmental, and particularly

air quality, implications of only delivering measures to improve access solely by private car are untenable. As such, the UGC has reinforced the need to deliver the three public transport schemes set out in the HS2 Connectivity Package (as per above), and is seeking to further enhance, and better integrate, their delivery through significant upgrade to the Birmingham International Station (as considered by Full Cabinet at its meeting on 7 December 2017; the papers for which are available at:

<http://eservices.solihull.gov.uk/mqInternet/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=130&MId=6572&Ver=4>

Solihull Connected

- 3.13 In consideration of the M42 Economic Gateway, HS2 Growth Strategy and the entirety of the UK Central vision across all four zones, the Council published its 'Solihull Connected' Transport Strategy and Delivery Plan in 2016.
- 3.14 Solihull Connected acknowledges the need for improvements to public transport provision within the Borough to enable a mass-transit network that has the potential to carry large numbers of people quickly, reliably and comfortably. As such, one of the key objectives of the Strategy is to "support and enable the integrated delivery of sustainable and efficient forms of transport like mass-transit, cycling and walking".
- 3.15 The Strategy subsequently sets out the requirement for public transport interventions that are of high quality, high frequency and capacity, reliable, safe and make use of modern, low emissions vehicles. It includes an indicative Public Transport network plan, which highlights the need for not only the A45 and Hall Green Sprint schemes, but also the need for potential additional Sprint interventions.
- 3.16 Further information on Solihull Connected is available at the link below and greater policy context, with respect to the A45 Sprint proposal, is provided within Appendix A.

<http://www.solihull.gov.uk/solihullconnected>

4. What options have been considered and what is the evidence telling us about them?

- 4.1 Transport for West Midlands (TfWM) has recently consulted on its proposals to deliver Sprint along the A45 corridor; a route that would connect Birmingham City Centre with Birmingham Airport and Solihull Town Centre. Consultation on this scheme has taken place ahead of many other schemes set out in the HS2 Growth Strategy as delivery of the scheme has been accelerated, due to it now being considered necessary to deliver the public transport ambition of the Birmingham Commonwealth Games in 2022.
- 4.2 The consultation on the A45 Sprint scheme ran from 22 August to 5 October 2018, with various engagement events organised by Transport for West Midlands – a number of public exhibitions (including one in Solihull Town Centre on 15 September) and a Member Drop-in Session (10 September) were provided, and those directly affected by the scheme received letters by post. In addition, a dedicated website was created, which included narrative about the Sprint concept and a set of plans to show

the proposed route and the highway measures / alterations to enable its delivery. The website, and scheme plans are available at:

<https://www.birminghambeheard.org.uk/economy/sprint/>

- 4.3 The consultation material was scrutinised in detail by Officers, culminating in the submission of the consultation response provided at Appendix A.
- 4.4 In considering how to respond to the consultation, it was important that a delicate balance be struck – whilst the A45 Sprint scheme aligns well with policy set out in Solihull Connected, and with material published by the Urban Growth Company, the challenge when delivering such a scheme should not be underestimated.
- 4.5 The promotion, and enabling, of bus schemes that offer genuine opportunity to deliver quicker, and more reliable, services should be encouraged. However, there is a finite quantum of space available within highway constraints in which to ensure the efficient movement of people in general, and the prioritisation of public transport services at key locations on the highway network can come at the detriment of movement by other modes of transport (particularly private car users and Heavy Goods Vehicles) and public environment (in terms of amenity, public realm and biodiversity). In practice, an appropriate compromise is required between public transport priority and movement by other modes.
- 4.6 For example, in 2015 the Council delivered measures that provide bus priority on Lode Lane, one of the key corridors providing access to Solihull Town Centre, and a busy route both in terms of private and public movements. The scheme provides priority for public transport at key locations and, despite initial concern during its implementation, post-scheme evaluation has identified that the scheme has delivered reduced journey times for buses, with negligible impact on general road users. The scheme delivered at Lode Lane therefore proves that the delicate balance between providing a level of priority for public transport, and maintaining a high quality public environment and the efficient movement of non-public transport users in general, can be achieved.
- 4.7 Although the A45 Sprint consultation material includes scheme plans, it should be noted that those plans are considered to be preliminary, as there a number of key workstreams that remain in progress (e.g. traffic modelling). Given the current stage of development, the decision was therefore taken in the Council's consultation response to offer conditional support for A45 Sprint, subject to satisfactory conclusion of those workstreams.
- 4.8 It is anticipated that the information required by the Council to better understand the detailed implications of the A45 Sprint proposal will only become available once individual workstreams are completed. As the workstreams are unlikely to all be completed at the same time, support for the scheme is sought at this stage, along with approval to delegate authority to the Assistant Director – Highways & Environment, in consultation with the Cabinet Portfolio Holder – Transport & Highways, to deal with such matters of detail as and when they arise.

Transport for West Midlands – Feedback on Consultation Responses

- 4.9 At the time of drafting, Transport for West Midlands has yet to publish its report on the consultation outcomes. However, some initial information has been provided for inclusion within this report:
- In total there were 284 responses to the online questionnaire, 80 of which were submitted from respondents with a Solihull postcodes;
 - 139 bus passengers were interviewed, of which 26 provided a Solihull postcode for reference;
 - 6 paper copies of the questionnaire were submitted, of which 1 was from a Solihull resident;
 - 73.8% of the Solihull based responses agreed with the need to provide reliable bus journey times on the A45 corridor; and
 - 68.2% of the Solihull based responses fully, or partially, supported the scheme route proposals.
- 4.10 Through comments / feedback provided by those based in Solihull, a number of general themes have been raised, including:
- Support, including from those living adjacent to the route, for investment in public transport, particularly bus services that result in quicker and more efficient journeys;
 - Concern regarding congestion and queuing in particular locations, both during scheme operation as well as implementation;
 - The removal of trees and vegetation could generate negative impacts on the environment;
 - Uncertainty regarding impacts on existing bus services, and the suggestion that funding could be better directed in improving those services, rather than delivering Sprint.
 - A need to consider provision for cyclists at specific locations; and
 - Requests both for additional stops, as well as fewer stops (with greater distance between).
- 5. Reasons for recommending preferred option**
- 5.1 When responding to the A45 Sprint consultation, it was considered inappropriate not to offer some form of support for the proposal, given reference to it in both Solihull Connected and UK Central material, as well as the HS2 Growth Strategy and Connectivity Package.

- 5.2 However, it would be equally as inappropriate to offer unconditional support as the Council cannot be certain, based on the material available at this stage of scheme development, that its interests and obligations as a Local Highway Authority can be met. Therefore, the Council's consultation response at Appendix A sets out the terms for conditional support, and this report seeks approval to endorse that response and the mechanism by which the outstanding matters of detail can be resolved and approved.
- 5.3 Following review of the initial consultation feedback provided by TfWM, the Council's response is considered to provide the appropriate context and framework within which the Council can also respond to the issues raised by those in Solihull as part of the consultation. For example, the Council's response requires further traffic modelling evidence from TfWM to better understand the impact on traffic associated with the proposal; a requirement that aligns directly with concerns by Solihull respondents regarding increased congestion. It should be noted that, once available, TfWM's formal consultation report will be reviewed, and the need for matters to be added to the Council's agenda considered.

6. Implications and Considerations

6.1 Delivery of key themes in the Council Plan:

The delivery of the A45 Sprint scheme has the potential to contribute to the delivery of the following key themes in the Council Plan:

- Improve Health and Wellbeing
- Managed Growth
- Build Stronger Communities
- Deliver Value

6.2 Implications for children and young people, vulnerable groups and particular communities:

- 6.2.1 The A45 Sprint scheme is proposed by Transport for West Midlands with the intention of providing an affordable and competitive public transport offer. The prioritisation of public transport at key locations on the transport network, and the implementation of bus lanes, will deliver reduced journey times and increased journey time reliability – thereby helping to overcome two of the key barriers to securing employment, and broadening the opportunities for those not in education, employment or training.
- 6.2.2 It is the Council's understanding that the operator of the A45 Sprint scheme is yet to be determined, but the vehicles to be used, and the associated bus stop infrastructure, will all be designed so as to be compliant with all necessary standards and accessible for all users.

6.3 Consultation and Scrutiny:

6.3.1 The A45 Sprint scheme itself has not yet been considered by any of the Council's Scrutiny Boards. However, Solihull Connected, and therefore the reference to the need for Sprint, was considered by the Economic Development and Managed Growth Scrutiny Board in July 2015 and March 2016.

6.3.2 As referenced above, public consultation on the A45 Sprint scheme was conducted by Transport for West Midlands between 22 August and 5 October 2018, the Council's response to which is provided at Appendix A.

6.4 Financial implications:

6.4.1 There are no financial implications as a direct result of this report.

6.4.2 However, the implementation of Sprint will introduce new and / or additional infrastructure onto the Solihull highway network, generating an additional burden / maintenance liability for the Council. The Council will therefore work with Transport for West Midlands to ensure that a suitable commuted sum be provided, on terms to be agreed.

6.4.3 In addition, although the scheme will be implemented by TfWM, its delivery is contingent upon Traffic Regulation Orders being undertaken by Solihull MBC, which will almost certainly require decisions to be made by the Cabinet Member and the application of staff time and resources. The Council will ensure that the costs associated with such activities are met by TfWM.

6.5 Legal implications:

6.5.1 There are no legal implications as a direct result of this report. However, the precise mechanism by which the scheme will be delivered is yet to be determined and legal agreement is likely to be a requirement should it be either Transport for West Midlands delivering the scheme, or Solihull MBC doing so on their behalf.

6.6 Risk implications:

6.6.1 The Corporate Risks Management approach has been applied to identify and assess the significant risks associated with this decision. This includes but is not limited to political, legislation and reputation risks.

6.6.2 Transport for West Midlands, as promoter for A45 Sprint, holds a scheme-specific Risk Register.

6.7 Statutory Equality Duty:

6.7.1 An approved Fair Treatment Assessment is in place for Solihull Connected. Transport for West Midlands, as scheme promoter, will need to ensure that the equivalent is in place for their scheme.

7. List of appendices referred to

7.1 Appendix A: A45 Sprint Consultation – SMBC Technical Response

8. Background papers used to compile this report

8.1 Solihull Connected Transport Strategy:

<http://www.solihull.gov.uk/solihullconnected>

8.2 HS2 Growth Strategy and Connectivity Package

<https://gbslep.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/HS2-GS-FINAL.pdf>

<https://www.tfwm.org.uk/media/1102/hs2-connectivity-package.pdf>

8.3 Urban Growth Company – Growth and Infrastructure Plan and Hub Development Framework

<https://www.ugcsolihull.uk/publications/>

9. List of other relevant documents

9.1 Not applicable.