

**SOUTH WEST REGIONAL ASSEMBLY****30<sup>th</sup> April 2004****Welcome**

Jane Scott, Leader of Wiltshire County Council, extended a warm welcome to Wiltshire to all Assembly members, and hoped they would enjoy their visit to County Hall and have a successful meeting. The Chair of the Assembly thanked Wiltshire for their hospitality.

**Present:**

A list of those attending is attached at Appendix 1.

**1. Apologies**

1.1 Apologies were shown on the attendance list in circulation.

**2. Declarations of Interest**

2.1 Member were reminded to hand in their Declarations of Interest in connection with the two items on today's agenda.

**3. SWARMMS**

3.1 Members had received the report of the Members' Panel on the Highway's Agency's assessment of options for the second strategic route to the south west – whether improvements should be made to the A358 or the A303.

3.2 Julian Johnson, Chair of the Regional Spatial Strategy Steering Group and Chair of the Panel, gave a presentation. A copy of his slides is attached at Appendix 2. The Chairman thanked the Panel for all their work, the consultants, the Secretariat and the 180 respondents to the consultation. He confirmed that a copy of the letter which went to the Secretary of State would be circulated to all interested parties.

3.3 During the discussion which followed, 37 Members spoke, and the following points were raised:-

- There was general agreement that a second strategic route into the region was crucial and necessary, not only from the economic viewpoint, especially tourism, but also from the social areas perspective;
- Several members made the point that both the A358 and the A303 needed to be improved – it was really a question of which route was improved first;
- The options needed to be viewed as part of the overall SWARMMS package, and whichever of the two options was chosen, the other should not be lost sight of;

- Whichever scheme was chosen, the route should be made attractive, with some of the money spent on creative and stylish architecture;
- Many members supported both options, but recognised the short term need to choose.

**3.4 The following points were raised in favour of the A303:-**

- Parish councils along the route favoured the dualling;
- The road safety benefits were perceived to be greater than for the A358;
- The capacity for increased traffic was greater on the A303 and it would bring greater benefits to the tourist industry;
- The environmental damage could be mitigated;
- The region could not continue to rely solely on the M5 as the main strategic route into the region;
- CO2 emissions would be lower with the A303 option;
- Cornwall was an economically severely deprived region and would benefit more from the improvement of the A303;
- The opening of the A303 as the second strategic route would help relieve motorway congestion as far away as Bristol;
- Improving the A358 would only enhance the existing strategic route in to the region while improving the A303 would fully open a second strategic route;
- Improved journey times would mean increased reliability for businesses, which was very important in terms of economic competitiveness.

**3.5 The following points were raised in favour of the A358:-**

- It was a more deliverable scheme than the A303, as it was significantly cheaper – it was therefore much more likely to be achieved;
- There was significantly less damage to the environment with this scheme;
- Economically, Taunton, Dorset, West Somerset and northern Devon would benefit;
- The general direction of freight movement in the region favoured this route;
- It delivered both east/west and north/south improvements;
- The M5 could accommodate extra traffic;
- The SWARMMS study had come down in favour of this route;
- The economic benefits to Devon and Cornwall from this option have been underplayed;
- This gives drivers the option of transferring to the A303 if the motorway is closed.

**3.6 The Chairman thanked everyone for their contributions before moving to the vote. He explained that, at the moment, the Social, Economic and Environmental Partners were excluded by the Constitution from voting on regional planning matters, although the Assembly had agreed**

when the Planning Bill came into effect to change the Constitution in line with Government requirements. For this reason, he proposed that local authority votes should be recorded separately, but that SEEP votes should be taken into account when expressing the views of the Assembly as a whole.

- 3.7 Members first voted on the amendment proposed by Rev Heather Pencavel, seconded by Christopher Irwin, to amend the first recommendation to read:-

“Reiterates its support for the package of proposals set out in the SWARMMS Study, which emphasises that, while accepting the need for improvements to the Strategic Road Network and the Strategic Rail Network, these must be complemented by effective measures to reduce the need to travel (in accordance with RPG10) to manage more local road traffic by providing for complementary investment in the rail network, public transport including bus priority lanes, park and ride, and appropriate demand management and significant soft measures”. This was **AGREED**.

- 3.8 The following recommendations were also **AGREED** as follows:-

The Assembly:-

- (i) Welcomes the opportunity to provide the Secretary of State for Transport with its views and assessment of the options set out in the Highways Agency’s report for completing the second strategic route;
  - (ii) Welcomes the acceptance by Secretary of State of the recommendation in SWARMMS of the need for a second strategic route, but urges him to make a firm commitment to funding this second strategic route in order to help address the poor economic performance in the far south west of the region, to maintain the region’s position as a premier UK tourism destination, and to support the region’s continued growth in population in ways which benefits both urban and rural communities in the South West;
  - (iii) Recognises that the construction of the second strategic route will have significant implications for the Principal Urban Areas (PUA’s) of Taunton and Exeter, and therefore accepts that the Regional Transport Strategy and Local Transport Plans covering the two PUA’s will need to support a package of measures including the provision of public transport alternatives and other measures to ensure that the strategic route is protected.
- 3.9 Members then held a paper vote on Option A or B.

**Option A** was to support the improvement of the A358 by dualling and trunking the road between Ilminster and the M5, including the provision of two free flow slip roads linking it south and east bound with the M5, to support safety improvements along the A303 between Ilminster and Honiton, and to request the Secretary of State to keep under review the need for further improvement of the A303 following changes in the volume and nature of future traffic flows.

**Option B** was to support the improvement of the A303 by dualling the road from Ilminster to Honiton and to re-assesses the need for provision of an improved North-South route through the central part of the region as part of its review of the Regional Transport Strategy in the context of the preparation of the Regional Spatial Strategy.

- 3.10 The results of the vote were as follows:-  
Option A – Local Authorities 29, SEEPs 12  
Option B – Local Authorities 33, SEEPs 9.

Total for Option A = 41, Option B = 42.

It was therefore AGREED to support the improvement of the A303 and to make that recommendation to the Secretary of State.

The Assembly then broke for lunch.

#### **4. Bristol/Bath to South Coast Study**

- 4.1 Members received a report presenting the conclusions and recommendations of the Members' Transport Group on the Bristol/Bath to South Coast Study (BB2SCS). The report contained a number of recommendations on each of the strategic issues.
- 4.2 Chris Elton, Director of Strategy, gave a presentation on the issues – a copy of his slides is attached at Appendix 3. The main issues concerned the importance of this strategic north/south route in the region, from the M4 and the cities of Bristol and Bath to the south coast ports, the proposed de-trunking of the A36/A46, and the role of the A350.
- 4.3 Points raised in discussion included:-
- It was generally felt that the A350 south of Melbury Abbas was in need of improvement. The road passed through eleven villages, and the volume of HGV traffic was considerable. Lorries automatically took this route to get to the M4 but if two lorries met, there were many places where they could not pass.
  - The aim was not to increase the capacity of the A350 but to make it more able to cope with the volume of traffic which it was carrying at the moment. Residents in this corridor were suffering considerable environmental detriment;
  - There was concern about the concentration on road traffic; the Assembly should also look at rail, bus and coach networks. It would cost a relatively small amount to upgrade the rail network to a satisfactory level in this area;
  - Car traffic in Bath needed looking at separately, as it was a very particular problem;
  - This north/south route was a major corridor for freight and ferry passengers going to France and its importance should not be under-played;
  - Bristol should be included in the study area shown on the map, as it was in the title of the study;

- Filton Abbeywood station should have special consideration, as it was an important junction;
- It was hoped that Park and Ride would be expanded before the A36 was de-trunked, as this would help to relieve congestion on road network;
- The Assembly should lobby for an effective structure for Government transport funding – currently it was compartmentalised, so talk of integrated transport was pointless if the funding was not there to back it up;
- A series of bypasses was not a strategic, joined-up way of thinking about this route. However, a bypass for Westbury was urgently needed in view of the large numbers of HGVs going through the town and the fact that the A350 was a strategic, regionally significant route.

4.4 Members then moved to vote on the recommendations as set out in the report. The addition of a ninth recommendation, moved by Angus Campbell and seconded by Gil Streets, was **AGREED**. The recommendations were therefore presented as follows:-

The Assembly will:

- (i) Withdraw its objection to detrunking of the A36/A46 in view of the results of the consultant's analysis of the function of the route which shows it is not inter-regional in function.
- (ii) Support the establishment of a route or corridor co-ordinating group to ensure a consistent treatment for the corridor in individual Local Transport Plans and between delivery agencies.
- (iii) Agree with the Consultants emphasis of a 'route management approach' making the most effective use of the network.
- (iv) Support the delivery of modal shift by rail and the establishment of clock-face services linking Bristol/Bath to Southampton. The Assembly also wishes to see the current overcrowding resolved by producing rolling stock capacity in the short term.
- (v) Support the need for an area strategy for Bath which will address the impact of North-South HGV through traffic on the World Heritage City. The strategy to include a further assessment of a package of measures including demand management, an A36-46 link and expansion of Park and Ride.
- (vi) Support the need for Local Authorities to work with bus companies to maximise the opportunity for bus use including the development of hub and interchange facilities and bus priority corridors.

- (vii) Support a signage strategy to direct HGV's to the A34 as the main inter-regional north-south route.
- (viii) Support the consideration of the North - South routes through the central part of the region as part of the review of the Regional Transport Strategy having regard to decisions on the second strategic route into the South West (A303/A358).
- (ix) Acknowledge the regional function of the A350 and ensure that the review of the Regional Transport Strategy examines the need for a policy base for measures to mitigate the environmental impacts of HGV traffic on the region's rural communities.

These recommendations were **AGREED** unanimously.

## **5. FAREWELL TO CHRIS ELTON**

The Chairman reminded members that this was Chris Elton's last meeting, as he was retiring from the Assembly this day. On behalf of members, the Chair thanked Chris for all his hard work in helping to get the Assembly up and running, and making a substantial contribution to the development of the policy agenda. He wished him well for the future. Other members and the Secretariat staff joined in thanking Chris Elton.

**CHAIRMAN**