

Steve Wilson – Notes on the Presentation on proposals for Melksham Bypass

Unfortunately, due to technical issues, it has not been possible to upload the recorded presentation to the website. So this is a typed up transcript of what was presented. These notes should be read alongside the series of slides that were presented.

Slide 1 – Welcome slide

Slide 2 – Background

The importance of the A350 to the local economy has long been recognized by Wiltshire Council. It is the primary route from north to south between the M4 and the Dorset coast. As such it is one of the busiest routes connecting settlements. Sections of the A350 are subject to high volumes of traffic, congestion and delays. In 2019 Wiltshire Council successfully secured funding from the DfT to prepare an Outline Business Case for a bypass that would alleviate the current and future problems as volumes of traffic are predicted to increase.

Slide 3 – Scheme Preparation Process

12 stages:

1. Identify need for a scheme and outline options
2. Strategic outline business case
3. Review options and confirm initial assessment
4. Detailed assess of better performing options.
5. Adopt a preferred route
6. Submit outline business case
7. Planning Application
8. Compulsory purchase and side road orders.
9. Possible public enquiry
10. Tender for construction works
11. Full business case
12. Construction

We have gone through the first two stages and are now at the “Review options and confirm initial assessment” stage. The public consultation will be launched at the Melksham Area Board meeting on 4th November.

It will take around 12 months to get through the next couple of stages to reach stage 6 “Submit outline business case”. If we are successful at achieving further funding, we will go on to the planning application stage which in itself will be a long process with hurdles to overcome. We would then have to enter into some compulsory purchase

arrangements to assemble the land for the scheme and then there would be a need for side road orders.

Stage 9. Public Enquiry – with the size of this road development, it is highly likely that there would be a public inquiry.

Stage 10 & 11 - Tender and Full business case

At stages 3, 5, 7 and 9, there will be opportunities for key stakeholders involvement and public consultations. So the launch on the 4th is not the only opportunity for people to be involved.

Slide 4 – Existing A350 issues

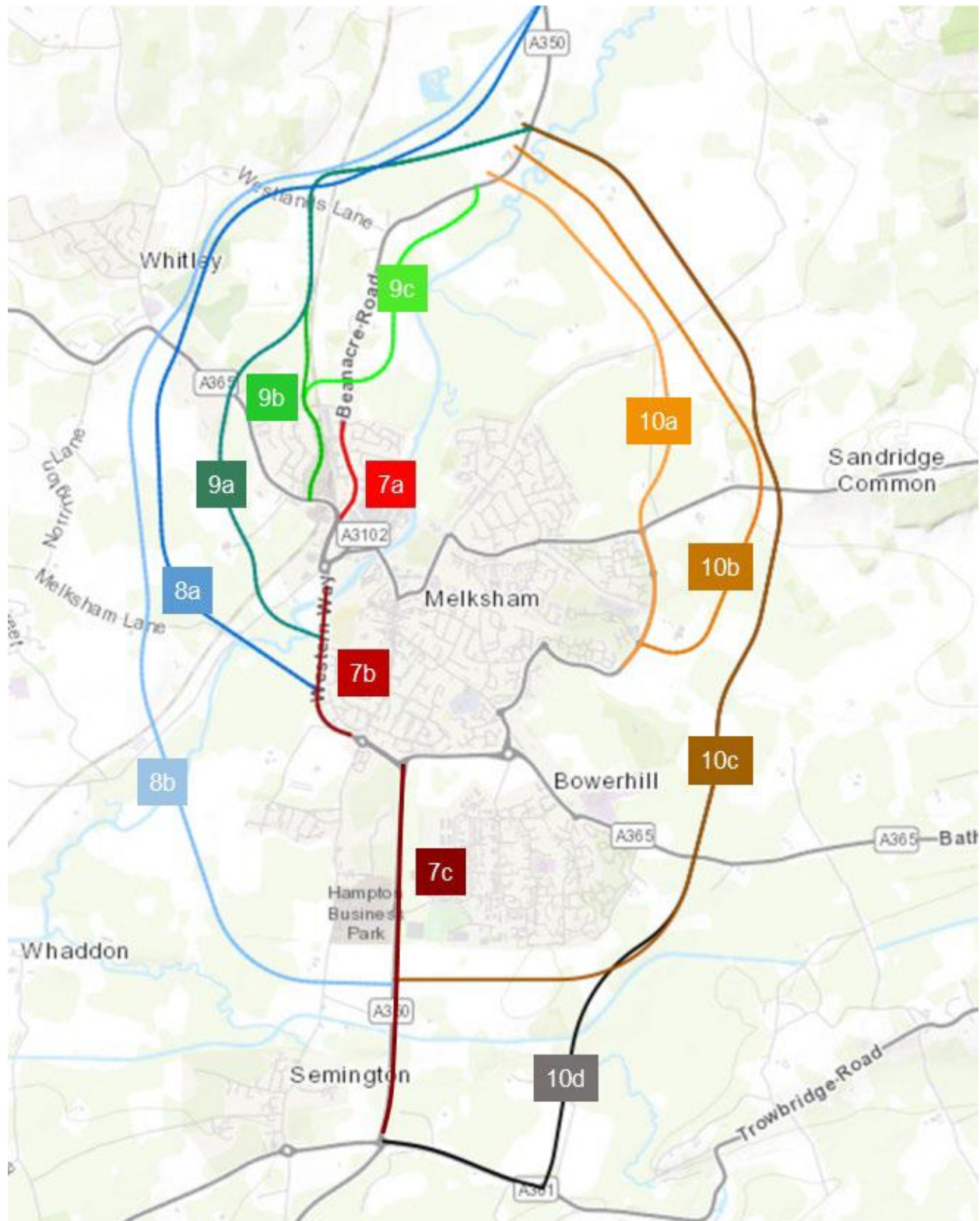
Outlines reasons for the need for improvements to the A350. Slow moving traffic problems. Severence effect, for example cuts off the railway from the town centre. Key concern is future traffic growth. The map demonstrates what would happen if we did nothing between 2018 and 2036. There will be large increases of traffic use on the A350. Because the amount of increased traffic it can take, it will eventually move the traffic problems onto other roads in the town centre and radial routes.

Slide 5 – The Approach to option development

This has to go through the options logically and in a robust manner. Must follow government guidelines. If we don't do this we will not be successful in the business case submission. As we go from the long list of options to the short list and preferred options, the level of input we need to provide and the level of evidence and analysis needs to grow.

Slide 6 – Full range of Options:

We believe there is a local perception that one route has been decided and adopted. Nothing can be further from the truth.. We have a full range of options available to us and are considering as we go through the early development of the outline business case. There are 10 different concepts and various different sub-options to some of those concepts.



Options 1-6 are non road based options. 1,2 and 3 are called demand management and are about trying to come up with strategies to stop traffic coming or going through Melksham: eg car park levy to workers, congestion charging, weight restriction on A350 to force HGVs to go elsewhere. Think of ways to restrict the use of the A350. These options did not perform well in the outline business case. But as we go forward, these have to be reviewed again. As we go through 4, 5 and 6 making improvements to public transport and walking and cycling routes. As with the options 1,2 &3, they did not perform well in the outline business case, and did not address the key issues with the A350. However, there is nothing at all to stop some of these potential options coming forward alongside a bypass being built. If you take traffic off the A350, that generates road space capacity. A reduction of traffic growth in the town centre may generate opportunities to improve walking and cycling in the town centre. These would be complementary measures to be developed alongside a bypass.

Options 7 – all along the A350, can we further improve the existing corridor, as was done at the Farmers Roundabout. They provide capacity enhancements, but they don't necessarily address some of the severance, noise and pollution issues

Options 8 and 9 –are about routes to the west of the town. More problematic than east in terms of constraints. Railway line to west. A bypass would have to cross it twice. Electrical sub-station and power lines present constraints and difficulties in aligning a route. River Avon and flood plains on western side. Flood plains on east as well.

Options 10 – Eastern routes. 10a and 10c were the options that performed best at the strategic outline stage. Merits in own right, less constrained than the west. 10c is expensive but seems to perform the best. The new route 10d is an extension to 10c and has come about primarily because of suggestions raised at the March Area Board meeting. We gave an undertaking at the Area Board meeting to have a look at this as an option and see whether it had any merit. Looked at various permutations of it and at first glance it seemed an expensive alternative compared to 10c. It is longer, crossing of the canal, crossing of Semington brook flood plan and a new junction on the A361. However, the issue of the limiting factors of the highway network is the Semington bypass link down to Littleton roundabout. It may be that any of these options come forward in their own right, they would need to be supplemented with part of 7c, to dual carriageway that section underneath the aquaduct. Now comparing 10c with 10d as an example and no merit in 10d, you are now comparing 10d with 10c +7c. It then becomes more comparable and it is right that we investigate this route. The challenges of crossing the canal, Semington Brook and some upgrade of the A361 are very real, but we do need to investigate that to see if there is any merit to route 10d or whether it will fall by the wayside as we move to the short and towards a preferred route.

Slide 7 What happens next

There are ongoing technical investigation works. Consultants Atkins have written to landowners to carry out ecology, environment walk over surveys. Need to gather evidence to see if routes are viable or unviable. We can only do that if we can see the evidence which then adds to the argument that certain routes should be discounted as we move to the short list of options.

Launch of consultation at Melksham Area Board Meeting on 4th November at 7pm
Runs to end November. People will be able to go onto a dedicated website and download an information pack which will provide a lot more information, such as need for the scheme and background, local benefits and priorities we are seeking to address. Will be able to see the routes in a lot more detail. One sheet of A4 per route, will describe it in more detail, touch on positives and downsides and listing out the assessment criteria. There will also be an indication of the emerging analysis that we are conducting at the moment is suggesting. So people will be able to see where we think routes are perhaps more beneficial than others.

All suggestions will be welcome and will be considered. All responses will go into an assessment process and will help inform the decision making as we go from long list to short list and then to the preferred route. Preferred route will go to Wiltshire Council and the adoption of that route will be a Wiltshire Council Cabinet decision.

We are anticipating getting through the current phase of work through to the adoption of the preferred route and the submission of the Outline Business Case by October 2021. Beyond that the other stepping stones, planning application, public enquiry CPO issues at the very earliest getting to site in 2024-25 and the earliest we would have a scheme built is 2027. There are an awful lot of hurdles to achieve and overcome that kind of timescale.

End

Email address: majorhighwayprojects@wiltshire.gov.uk

Website address to be available after the 4th November launch.

Questions and Answers

Steve Wilson answered the following questions:

Q1 Will the new bypass need to be built on any flood plains?

A1 Yes in both options to west and east. Need to cross at least one flood plan.

Q2 How much extra does this cost? i.e per 100m

A2. Extremely difficult to give an answer. Depends on nature of bridges needing to be built, length, what foundations are needed. Can't determine a cost until there is a design and underlying ground investigations. Likely to be six figures.

Q3 Why will a new crossing be considered over the canal when there is already capacity for an extra lane on the existing A350 under the canal at Semington?

A3 This was addressed in the presentation, by talking about the limitations of the Semington bypass and why 10d has some merit. If we have to discount 10d, it has to be done so on evidence.

Q4 How much is the cost of a new crossing over the canal?

A4. Very difficult to say at this stage without doing a design and ground investigations. Would be in the millions of pounds.

Q5 What will the speed limit be on this new road?

A5. Proposing design speed to be national speed limit, with reductions at junctions down to 40mph and 50mph

Q6. Will all ProW's be respected and retained?

A6. Side roads orders. Will be changes to RoW and the lanes. And will need to be a legal process for that to go forward. All to be considered. PrOW as they cross the new road will need to be considered and managed, diverted, underpasses. All for debate, discussion and evolution.

Q7 How will pedestrians, cyclists and horseriders cross this road?

A7. Tied up with above. If crossing point close to junctions, there would be at grade crossings; If walkways between junctions could be underpasses. Need to undertake a WCHAR – walking, cycling and horse-riding assessment. We need to do this to assess where people going to and from and whether the design for the bypass suitably address their needs.

Q8 Why would we want another junction coming onto, or almost next to, the Semington roundabout when that roundabout is already very busy and it can take many minutes and queuing from the A361 to get on that roundabout at the best of times.

A8 Option 10D would include an upgrade of the A361 to the Littleton roundabout.

Q9 As you are aware, a map has been circulating around the parish showing a route that crosses the canal into Seend Parish and crosses the area known as the water meadows because they regularly flood. This route was not one of the original route options advertised earlier in the year. Can you explain why this is now being considered when there would be so many difficulties to overcome with this route.

A9. Already addressed in the presentation.

Q10. Can you confirm that all the options are being considered equally?

A10 Yes all options are being considered equally.

Q11. What weighting will be given to the environmental impact including noise and light.

A.11 No formula to state that a certain percentage of a decision is based on environmental or economic matters. The scheme will need to develop a business case that will addresses such things as environmental impact. Benefit to cost ratio and that will determine whether we have a viable scheme or not. When we get to planning app stage, there will need to be environmental assessment, flood risk assessments.

Q12. What alternatives are being proposed to use the budget for the bypass in a manner that aligns with options avoiding road building, like an integrated public transport network?

A12. We have been given a grant from the DfT to specifically prepare an outline business case for this proposal for this potential bypass. We can't take the money to be spend on something else. Can't use budget for other purposes. Improvement to walking and cycling would be seen as complimentary to the bypass so there is some merit in thinking about that.

Q13. Once the MAB meeting details are known can we make them available to anyone from our parish, ie put them on our website? Will people be able to ask questions at the Area Board meeting?

A13. As soon as the details are in the public domain they will be available. Press release going out to advertise the Area Board. Need to check with AB chairman, but there is usually a QandA session at the meetings.

Q14. What is the deadline for comments for the first round of consultations?

A14. Deadline is end of November 2020.

Q15. Can you explain how people can make comments and how these will be reviewed.

A15. There will be an online questionnaire which will have a series of yes/no answers. And questions where you are asked your levels of agreement or disagreement. There will also be free text responses. So people will be able to provide commentary, not just yes/no answers. All comments made through the consultation will be collated and a report produced. The findings will feed into the assessment to the options. The findings of the consultation will be reported as they go into the next stage of consultation next summer as we get to the short list and work towards the preferred route.

Q16. What is the time frame for the various consultations before a route is decided upon.

A16. We are hoping to be at preferred route at latter part of summer/early Autumn in 2021 and submitting Outline Business Case in October 2021.

Q17. Janet Giles asked if people could send in their responses by post.

A17. Three different routes to respond. Preferred option is the survey, but can send responses by email and by post. The address will be given in the information pack on the website.