

REGIONAL TRANSPORT FORUM – 10 February 2009

REGIONAL FUNDING ALLOCATION - SOUTHEND-ON-SEA BOROUGH COUNCIL
PRIORY CRESCENT AND CUCKOO CORNER REVISED SCHEME PROPOSAL

Report by: Southend-on-Sea Borough Council

Purpose of report:

- To advise the Regional Transport Forum (RTF) of the option for the Region to move up to £5m from the Major Scheme budget to either the Integrated Transport or Maintenance Block allocation for a local authority which would be eligible for sub-£5m major schemes funding. The schemes concerned would not then be subject to DfT appraisal.
- To seek the region's approval for the Southend on Sea Borough Council scheme "Cuckoo Corner and Priory Crescent Improvement" to be funded by moving £5m to the Borough Council's Integrated Transport Block Allocation and for the Region to include this proposal in the advice to Government.

Recommendation:

1. That the RTF continues to support the scheme and remains content that the fully or part funded scheme continues to represent value for money and can be effectively delivered.
2. That the RTF recommends to the Region that, in its advice to Government, the proposal to move £5m from the Major Scheme regional allocation (up to 2013/14) to Southend on Sea Borough Council's Integrated Transport Block Allocation be supported.
3. That the Allocation be made to the most appropriate year, once the Borough Council has had the opportunity to finalise the revised scheme design and in accordance with any further DfT funding guidance on Block Allocations.

1 Introduction

- 1.1 Regions have been asked to advise on the overall balance of funding between major schemes and the block funding to be distributed between authorities. In doing so, there are a number of options, one of which is to consider transferring up to £5m from the East of England RFA into an eligible Authority's Integrated Transport Block Allocation. This follows the DfT further advice sent out in December 2008.
- 1.2 Currently, the Southend scheme has been allocated £7.5m in the RFA, which was recently reduced from £11.5m. This proposal would further reduce the RFA allocation by £2.5m to £5m.
- 1.3 The Borough Council has revisited the scheme again, following discussions with DfT and remains confident that improvements to the junction at Cuckoo Corner can be achieved utilising the £5m allocation with any remaining shortfall of funding being found by the Borough.
- 1.4 The £5m from the RFA would be a one-off payment. In addition, if for any reason the cost of the scheme increased, then this would also be for the Borough Council to cover any additional funding or through other non-RFA funding sources.
- 1.5 The DfT have confirmed that a revised Major Scheme Business Case will not be required for the scheme or any further modelling or appraisal assessment carried out other than that required to ensure that the Borough Council can satisfy itself that the scheme continues to represent value for money.

2 Previous scheme proposals

- 2.1 The A127/A1159 Priory Crescent and Cuckoo Corner improvement scheme was one of three, interlinked, elements of a Major Scheme contained in the first Southend on Sea Local Transport Plan 2001/02 to 2005/06.
- 2.2 The improvement consisted of dualling the existing single carriageway of Priory Crescent between Cuckoo Corner and Eastern Avenue (including a widened bridge) and also dualling that length of Eastern Avenue that is currently single carriageway, together with the improvement of Cuckoo Corner junction and its approaches.
- 2.3 There is common recognition that the major benefits to the scheme are to be found in the junction improvement at Cuckoo Corner and increasing the highway capacity (lane widths) on the approach from the east and the linkage with the access to the Prittle Brook Industrial Estate.
- 2.4 A revised proposal was submitted to DfT in 2008, estimated at £11.5m including a contingency item of 15% and optimism bias of 15%. This has recently been further reduced within the RFA to £7.5m due to the uncertainty of the redevelopment of the Prittle Brook Industrial Estate and the need to focus on the improvement at Cuckoo Corner. The scheme has been “scaled back” accordingly.

3 Taking the modified scheme forward

- 3.1 The original scheme was approved as a “1A” scheme in the previous RFA advice, but subject to agreement with DfT over the cost increase (from £3.5m in 2000). The introduction of the new MSBC Guidance last year required the Council to re-submit the Business Case and apply the latest guidance on modelling requirements. This has proved problematic to resolve without further investment in complex modelling and re-appraisal of the benefits (which were previously demonstrated at the Public Inquiry).
- 3.2 The current advice from DfT seeks to reduce the burden on authorities and encourage the delivery of smaller schemes, hence the desire to transfer funding to the Integrated Transport Block allocations.
- 3.3 Following on from this, the Borough Council wishes to resolve the longstanding scheme funding issue and move forward by focussing on improvements to the Cuckoo Corner junction, thus permitting a fresh approach to be developed, including:-
 - Taking account of known and predicted developments such as London Southend Airport growth and the relocated football club proposals, together with the timing of these developments and possible contributions that may be relevant to the Regional Infrastructure Fund or similar;
 - Consideration of the timing of the scheme in respect of the A127 CIF2 schemes at Progress Road and Victoria Gateway – all programmed to complete before 2011;
 - Taking account of future proposals as put forward within the Southend RFA2 proposals together with an opportunity to bid as part of the “Challenge Fund” proposals post 2013/14;
 - The appropriate measures for SERT – programmed to commence 2012/13;
 - Alternatives that better manage the local traffic movements;

4 Conclusion

- 4.1 On the basis of this report, Southend Borough Council requests that the Regional Transport Forum supports the proposals as set out and advises EERA that the appropriate allocation for this scheme should be based upon transferring £5m to the Borough Council’s Integrated Transport Block allocation. Options that take into account the above are being prepared and the Business Case is being re-visited.