

12 February 2020		ITEM: 12 Decision: 110523
Cabinet		
A13 East Facing Access Scheme Update		
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: Key	
Report of: Councillor Mark Coxshall, Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Strategic Planning		
Accountable Assistant Director: Leigh Nicholson, Interim Assistant Director of Planning, Transport and Public Protection.		
Accountable Director: Andrew Millard – Director of Place		
This report is public		

In 2018 the Council submitted a funding bid for £48.5m through the Major Road Network (MRN) Funding Submission for an east facing access on the A13. Following a Ministerial Announcement by the Secretary of State for Transport in October 2018, Department for Transport (DfT) invited Thurrock Council to make an Outline Business Case and Detailed Design for the scheme.

The Outline Business Case and Detailed Design cannot be taken forward until a robust process of Options Assessment has been undertaken. This report seeks to update Members on the general progress relating to the A13 East Facing Access (EFA) scheme and to provide greater detail on the Options Assessment Report (OAR) process.

The report also sets out the next steps in relation to proposed timescales for progressing scheme options to Outline Business Case, updated scheme costs, detailed design and Full Business Case submission to DfT.

1. Recommendations

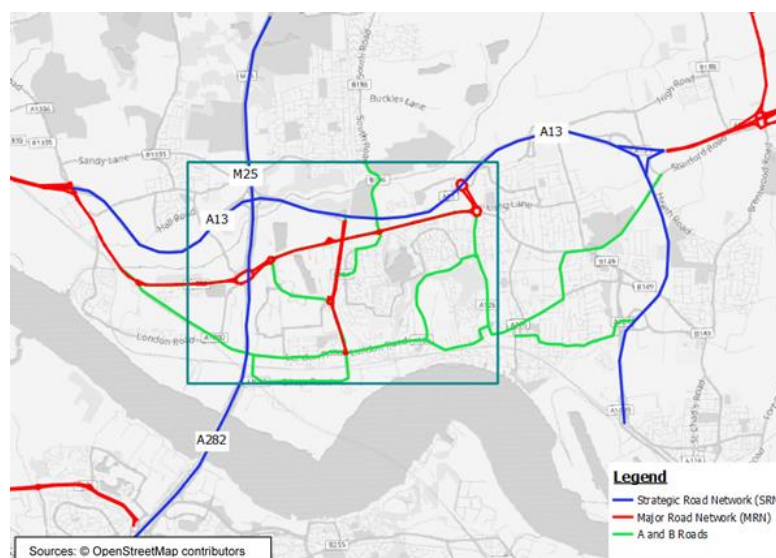
- 1.1 Cabinet note and endorse the work undertaken to develop the A13 East Facing Access scheme to date.**
- 1.2 Cabinet note and endorse the Options Assessment process identifying the sifting process and prioritisation of schemes for submission to the Department for Transport.**
- 1.3 Cabinet note the funding implications associated with the A13 East Facing Access scheme options, as set out in Section 7.**

- 1.4 **Agree that the Director of Place in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Strategic Planning submit the outline business case to the Department for Transport and continue to develop the full business case for the scheme.**

2. Introduction and Background

- 2.1 The implementation of an A13 East Facing Access road project (often referred to as 'East Facing Slip Roads') is a long-held ambition for Thurrock Council. Access improvements would enhance capacity at J30 of the M25 (a nationally significant part of the strategic road network) and would support free-flowing traffic on the A13 and unlock congestion and gridlock issues across Thurrock, South Essex and the wider Thames Estuary area.
- 2.2 The Thurrock Local Plan Issues and Options Stage 2 Consultation Document (December 2018) set out the Council's ambition to deliver 32,000 new homes and 24,500 new jobs. In many ways, the level of growth is dependent on the capacity of the A13.
- 2.3 The project is fundamentally focused on simplifying the A126/A13 access arrangements leading to significant benefits in terms of relieving congestion and associated potential environmental improvements by reducing traffic flows and travel distances on the adjacent road network, including the A1306 and B186.
- 2.4 As shown in Figure 1, the area of scope for the A13 EFA scheme includes the A13 between M25 J30 and North Stifford Interchange, the A1306 Arterial Way, the A126 and the B186.

Figure 1: Area of impact



2.5 The Option Assessment Report (OAR) sets out the key transport problems, transport needs, objectives and high-level options for the East Facing Access scheme. The aim of the OAR is to identify and consider all reasonable scheme options, to set out why certain options have not been selected and which options have been prioritised for inclusion in the Outline Business Case.

3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

3.1 Current and future issues

3.2 As set out above, there has been a longstanding desire to improve the connection between the Lakeside basin and the strategic road network. Many of the traffic-related issues in the basin and surrounding built-up area are directly related to the lack of direct access to the A13 to travel east.

3.3 The local road network does not experience the traditional 'commuter' peaks in the morning and evening rush hours. Due to the prevalence of the retail employment in the area, the evening peak extends from early afternoon through to early evening through the week and weekends meaning that the poor traffic conditions are experienced by shoppers, workers and residents for a considerable portion of the week.

3.4 Excess traffic on the local roads has been seen to lead to:

- Congestion and slow journey speeds through much of the day;
- Collision concentrations can be seen at the Stifford Interchange due to the high volumes of conflicting traffic, moving in a constantly stop-start manner due to queuing;
- The A1306 in particular is the location for Air Quality Management Areas (AQMA), where the amount of private and commercial traffic has pollution impacts.

3.5 Through the analysis of national traffic forecasts, it is estimated that vehicle trips at peak times are expected to increase between 17-26% across the study area between 2018 and 2036. Without key infrastructure investment or significant changes in travel demand and behaviour, this growth will exacerbate the existing issues and make it unviable for business to expand or move to the area.

Objectives

3.6 The overarching objective of the A13 East Facing Access scheme is to improve strategic connectivity to the east which will reduce congestion across the study area. This will have an impact on journeys along the A13, traffic visiting and leaving Lakeside as well as local traffic.

- 3.7 Reducing congestion will increase the capacity available in the local network, which will be able to accommodate future population, housing and economic growth planned in Thurrock.
- 3.8 The scheme will support sustainable growth and improve local accessibility, not only by road but also by other sustainable modes; the scheme will help to reduce severance on the B186 and A1306 and where possible create opportunities for dedicated infrastructure for walking and cycling.
- 3.9 The scheme will also reduce the likelihood of accidents, improve air quality and have minimal impacts on the local environment in order to ensure there are overall improvements to physical and mental wellbeing.

Option assessment process

- 3.10 In order to align with the DfT's Transport Appraisal Process, the following three-stage process has been adopted to support the selection of scheme options:

A - Appraising a range of strategic level solutions (rather than specific interventions) including all transport modes, managing demand as well as an option to do nothing.

The result of Stage A was the identification of online and offline highway approaches to be the focus for the remainder of the appraisal process.

B - Undertaking a long-listing exercise identifying many feasible online and offline highways options which fall under the preferred strategic approach, and then assessing those options against a range of social, economic and environmental criteria to lead to a shortlist.

The outcome of Stage B was the progression of options 6B, 1A, 4B, 4A and 2A to Stage C for further appraisal.

C - Appraising the shortlisted options (6B, 1A, 4B, 4A and 2A) to understand in greater depth the likely impacts and deliverability of the scheme options.

The result of Stage C was the identification of a set of preferred options to take forward for detailed assessment in the Outline Business Case (OBC).

The first two stages have been completed using a combination of desktop constraint and opportunity analysis, engineering judgment and stakeholder (Thurrock Council officers) involvement.

- 3.11 The framework used to appraise the options assessment was Mott MacDonald's in-house Investment Sifting and Evaluation Toolkit (INSET). INSET functions by undertaking a scoring assessment of multiple criteria, categorised by broader themes. The themes considered are:

• Transport Benefits	• Wider Economic Benefits
• Environment	• Social Impacts
• Alignment with Objectives	• Deliverability

3.12 The full criteria applied under these broad themes at each stage can be seen in Appendix A.

Stage A

3.13 In Stage A, the strategic level solutions identified for appraisal were:

- Do nothing
- New/improved bus services
- Increased rail frequencies
- Demand management
- Park & Ride
- Online highway improvements – improving the existing highway infrastructure.
- Offline highway improvements – new roads or substantial infrastructure
- Traffic management
- Active travel

3.14 The scoring of the strategic solutions determined that online and offline highway solutions were the most appropriate to take forward to Stage B. Active travel initiatives also scored highly, but such interventions on their own will not support the wider strategic connectivity objectives of the A13 EFA scheme. Consequently, active travel improvements are advised to be incorporated into both online and offline highways proposals.

Stage B

3.15 For the Stage B appraisal, a total of 21 potential online and offline highways schemes were drawn up. Sketches and descriptions can be found in Appendix B. All options were presented to officers from Thurrock Council to gather local knowledge and consolidate understanding as to which options are likely to be most plausible and feasible. These views were then incorporated into the scoring for the Stage B appraisal.

3.16 The Stage B appraisal assessed the transport benefits, wider economic benefits, environment, social impacts, alignment with objectives and deliverability themes in greater detail. The scores assigned to the 21 potential online and offline highway schemes in Stage B also incorporate several constraints. These included:

• Environmental designations	• Ancient Woodland	• AQMAs
• Flood zones	• Wildlife sites	• Buildings
• Travellers site	• Listed buildings	• Infrastructure

• Rail line	• Overbridges	• Level changes
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3.17 Following completion of Stage B, the highest scoring options were **6B and 1A**. **Options 4B, 4A and 2A** scored slightly lower than the top performing options but were still recognised as valid schemes to progress to the short-list. (Option scoring is attached in Appendix C)

Stage C

3.18 The five short-listed options were reappraised at Stage C, including undertaking preliminary traffic modelling to understand the relative impacts. The preferred options (1A and 6B) were progressed to the Outline Business Case (OBC) stage.

Confirmation of the options and next steps

3.19 It is suggested that the options to be taken forward to OBC are Options 6B and 1A. These options have been shown to score the highest in all themes and against most criteria throughout the Stage A and B assessment.

Figure 2: Option 6B

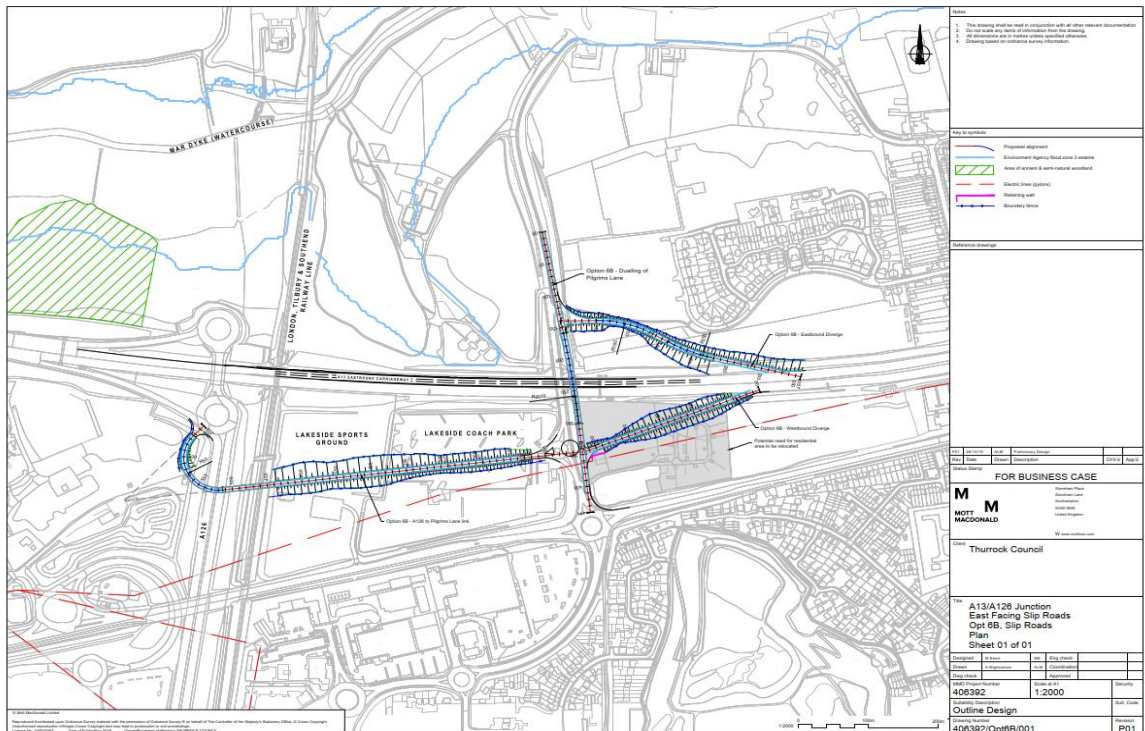
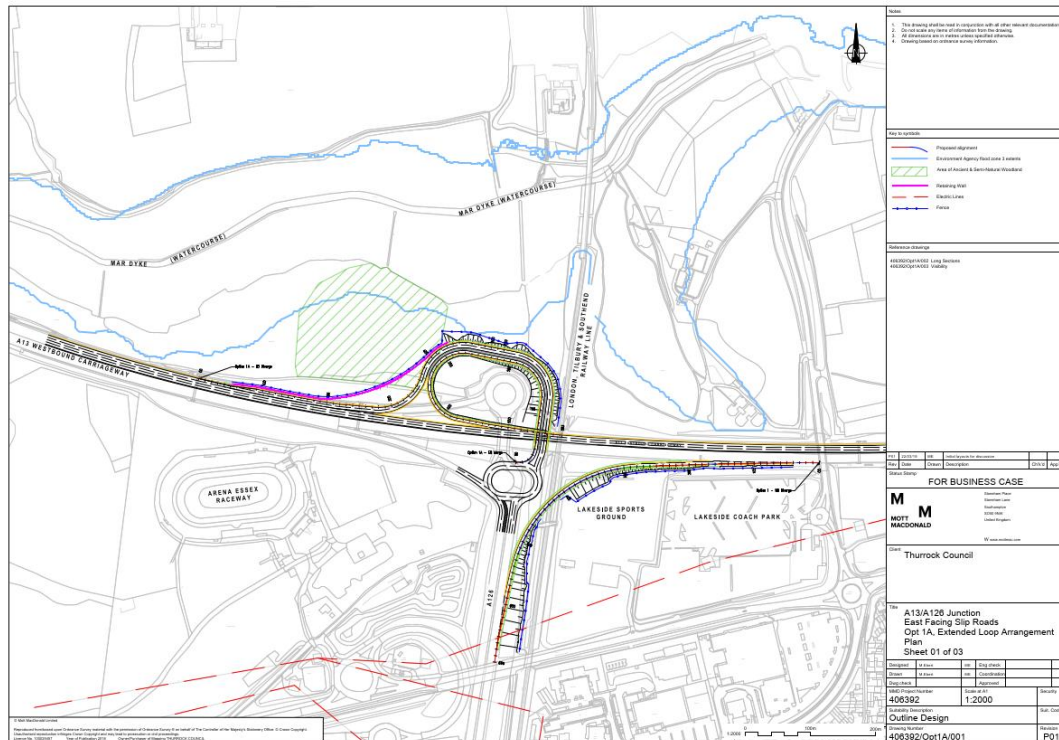


Figure 3: Option 1A



3.20 The above options scored particularly highly against the potential to deliver improved connectivity on both the local and strategic networks, and thereby reduce congestion, severance and accidents.

Rank	Scheme	Transport Benefits	Wider Economic Benefits	Environment	Social Impacts (QOL)	Alignment with objective	Deliverability
1	6B	Very good	Very good	Neutral-poor	Very good	Very good	Neutral-good
2	1A	Very good	Good	Poor	Very good	Good	Neutral-good

3.21 Nevertheless, both options will potentially have environmental and deliverability issues which will need to be mitigated during the design development stages. Option 1A would involve removal of an area of designated ancient woodland which would require significant mitigation. Option 1A also involves rail crossings and the loss of part of the existing football ground. Option 6B avoids the ancient woodland and public open space but has more significant impact on the existing football ground as well as an existing residential area and coach park. It also has the potential to frustrate the proposed housing development at Arena Essex.

3.22 The cost estimate for the preferred schemes has increased from the initial costs identified in the 2018 MRN submission. This is a result of undertaking a more robust costing approach to the scheme and the need to apply a higher level of risk funding to the proposed schemes.

- 3.23 The OBC will be submitted to DfT in February 2020. The Council can expect to receive confirmation from DfT within 4-6 weeks, following Minister approval. DfT will advise regarding the timeline and submission for the Full Business Case so that procurement of detailed design, project management and construction contracts can be progressed.

It is anticipated that the scheme will commence on site towards in mid-2023.

4. Reasons for Recommendation

- 4.1 A13 East Facing Access presents a 'game changing' opportunity in terms of enhanced connectivity and the network relief that will be applied across the local and strategic network. This scheme will improve capacity at J30 of the M25 (a nationally significant part of the strategic road network). It will also deliver free-flowing traffic on the A13 and unlock congestion and gridlock issues across Thurrock, South Essex and the Thames Estuary.

- 4.2 Delivering this additional capacity at J30, by removing both east bound and west bound traffic from this junction, will help to unlock the Council's requirement to deliver new homes and jobs in Thurrock. East Facing Access will also support the emerging South Essex 2050 Vision and Joint Strategic Plan (JSP) which identifies the A13 Corridor as a Strategic Area of Opportunity for the wider South Essex area where there is a need to deliver over 100,000 new homes in the period up to 2038 to meet future housing needs.

- 4.3 Failure to deliver an access improvement scheme on the A13 could stifle development potential within Thurrock and across the wider South Essex area.

- 4.4 Options 6B and 1A are to be taken forward to Outline Business Case submission to DfT in February 2020. These options have scored particularly highly against scheme objectives and potential to deliver improved connectivity on both the local and strategic networks. The scheme costs for Options 1A and 6B have increased from the initial MRN submission, and these costs will need to be borne by a combination of DfT funding and local sources, including developer contributions and Council funds.

5. Consultation (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)

- 5.1 Scheme options have been discussed and analysed within several workshop sessions in order to identify all reasonable possibilities. These options have undergone a 'sifting' process in order to identify the most suitable schemes.

- 5.2 High level discussion, with DfT and Highways England have progressed in order to gain a level of support for the scheme options.

- 5.3 Following submission of the OBC the Council will commence a more robust and focused programme of community and stakeholder engagement. This will

include community events and opportunities for the scheme objectives and details to be discussed and understood further.

- 5.4 The consultants for this scheme have a wide level of experience in community engagement and they will work closely with the Council's Community Engagement team to ensure that every opportunity for input and discussion is afforded.
- 5.5 PTR Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered a report on EFAS on 21.01.2020. Members of the Committee voiced their support for the scheme and its objectives. The key areas of discussion focussed upon the deliverability of the scheme, scheme finances, and scrutiny over the options assessment work.

6. Impact on corporate policies, priorities, performance and community impact

- 6.1 A13 East Facing Access will have an impact upon all communities within Thurrock. Implementing a scheme which improves connectivity and subsequently removes congestion and gridlock from the road network and improves traffic flow on local roads will support economic growth and promote Thurrock's Local Plan aspirations.
- 6.2 Improved network functionality and resilience will make Thurrock a more attractive place for business and developers to locate and enhance communities, making Thurrock a place where people of all ages can work, play, live and stay in a clean environment that everyone has reason to take pride in.

7. Implications

7.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **Jonathan Wilson**
Assistant Director, Finance

The scheme cost (both scheme options) is likely to be within the range of £70m-£85m

These costs are subject to additional scrutiny and may increase / decrease as scheme design and other factors are progressed.

DfT funding allocations will be attributed to 90% of the total scheme cost. The remaining 10% is to be allocated from contributions from Thurrock Council and other sources (such as developer contributions). This will be subject to consideration of the overall final projected cost to the Council.

Thurrock Council has already committed £3.5m to this scheme through the internal capital bid process. Developer contributions, equating to c£2.9m have been sought and are currently at different levels of negotiation and discussion.

It should be noted that both scheme options include a risk contingency of approximately £19m. Further discussion with the DfT will be undertaken to understand how additional costs will be allocated between funding partners.

Should the indicative costs exceed the provisional estimate for the scheme (inclusive of the contingency), then this will be reported back to Members. These costs will be better understood once the detailed design work has been undertaken.

7.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Tim Hallam**
Acting Head of Law, Assistant Director of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer

Legal Implications are contained within the body of the report, setting out the MRN bidding process, the Ministerial Announcement by the Secretary of State for Transport in October 2018 and DfT invitation to progress an Outline Business Case and Detailed Design.

An Options Assessment Report has been submitted to DfT and the Outline Business Case will be submitted to the department in February 2020 as requested, allowing detailed design and Full Business Case submission to be progressed.

There will be opportunity to apprise the Committee of the consenting route and likely timescales for business case submission and scheme construction. These elements can be covered in more detail as required.

7.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Natalie Smith**
Strategic Lead – Community Development and Equalities

An Equality Impact Assessment will be undertaken as the preferred A13 East Facing Access scheme is progressed.

The assessment will focus on key groups and locations across the borough to identify if the scheme has any adverse impact upon them and the mitigation measures that should be considered and applied, taking account of legislative considerations such as the Equality Act.

7.4 **Other implications** (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder, and Impact on Looked After Children)

None

8. **Background papers used in preparing the report** (including their location on the Council's website or identification whether any are exempt or protected by copyright):

- MRN Funding submission

9. **Appendices to the report**

- Appendix A – Assessment criteria
- Appendix B – Longlisted Schemes
- Appendix C – Scheme Option Scoring

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