

**SOUTH EAST ENGLAND
REGIONAL TRANSPORT BOARD**

Date: 1 February 2007

Subject: **Scheme Progress Monitor**

Report of: Planning Manager, South East England Regional Assembly

Recommendations:

It is recommended that the Board:

1. Notes the progress with regionally significant schemes.
2. Agrees to support the removal of the capacity bottleneck at Gatwick Airport station as being a scheme of regional significance.

Purpose of the Report:

To update the Board on progress with the delivery of proposals identified in the forward programme and to draw attention to issues needing action.

Key Issues:

Significant progress has been made with the development of a number of regionally significant transport schemes. This report provides a summary of progress to date.

I. A3 at Hindhead

- I.1 Following confirmation by the Secretary of State that the proposed improvement at Hindhead is to go ahead advance works on site have now begun. A start to the main construction works is programmed for April 2007 onwards.

2. Reading Station

- 2.1 Removing the capacity bottleneck at Reading Station is critical to addressing the poor performance and reliability record of services on the Great Western main line. In December 2006 Reading Borough Council led a delegation of representatives from the Reading Station Partnership Board, including representatives from the Regional Assembly and Network Rail, in order to present the scheme to the Secretary of State for Transport and Rail Minister. The briefing gave the Secretary of State the opportunity to be briefed first hand how work on the scheme has been progressing.
- 2.2 The Secretary of State was very interested in the progress that has been made and the commitment from the partners to ensure the scheme is ready to be delivered. Whilst any firm decision on funding for the scheme itself will not be made until later in the summer Network Rail continues to resource the work required to develop the scheme. It was apparent that the presentation by the partners was listened to with considerable interest and the wider benefits arising from the scheme were well understood by the Secretary of State.
- 2.3 Recently the working team lead by Network Rail that is developing the detail of the scheme has been expanded to include consultants employed by the DfT. This will help ensure that detailed development of the scheme will be in accordance with the requirements of the DfT. This will help ensure that the approval processes are as smooth as possible.

3. Airtrack

- 3.1 In November BAA announced that they will fund the development of the Transport and Works Act application required for the scheme. This is a significant step forward in terms of delivery of the scheme. BAA is currently in the process of appointing consultants and parliamentary agents to take forward this work and will shortly begin wider engagement with regional and local authorities and other interested bodies. A delivery timetable for the TWA process is being developed by BAA, however it is anticipated that the process will take around 18 - 24 months to complete.
- 3.2 Both the Regional Assembly and SEEDA are members of the Airtrack Forum, a local authority led organisation that promotes the Airtrack scheme. The Forum will continue to act in the role of supporting and advocating the scheme.

4. East West Rail (Western Section)

- 4.1 This will be the subject of a presentation to the Board under Item 9c. A summary of the work to date will be circulated at the meeting.

5. SMART (Southampton to West Midlands Freight Gauge Upgrade)

- 5.1 SEEDA has led the work in preparing the business case for this scheme in partnership with Network Rail working with other partners including the Regional Assembly and local authorities. In December 2006 the Secretary of State announced that he was minded to support the scheme subject to a formal funding package in place and confirmation of a final business case; the scheme is one of only six TiF proposals that have been taken forward to the next stage.
- 5.2 SEEDA is undertaking the development of a funding package for a third of the total cost of the scheme to come via non-DfT funding. The aim is to be able to submit further information to the Department by early spring. The Ministerial announcement has given sufficient confidence to Network Rail to start the investigations into how to address the gauge capacity issue at Southampton Tunnel, the only remaining section of the route to undergo significant additional work.

6. Lower Thames Crossing

- 6.1 At the Board's last meeting it resolved to actively support the need for the work required to inform further debate on this proposal to be taken forward as a matter of some urgency. The Board were made aware of a proposal by Kent and Essex County Council's to undertake some work and the Assembly indicated that it would be prepared to contribute financially to this work.
- 6.2 Subsequent to the Board's meeting the DfT have announced that they propose to commission their own work as part of a wider debate on the capacity of river crossings in the Dartford/Thames Gateway. Representatives from Board members will be involved in this work. It is proposed that the Assembly funding for work on this issue be made available to the DfT team.

7. Gatwick Airport Station

- 7.1 At the Board's last meeting it was agreed that the secretariat would consider a proposal that the need for improvements to Gatwick Airport Station be added to the list of regionally significant proposals. It has subsequently emerged through the discussions undertaken in developing the Board's response to the Brighton Main Line Route Utilisation Strategy that removing the capacity bottleneck at the station is the key to unlocking the long term potential of the Brighton Main Line. Briefings provided by Network Rail have highlighted the potential opportunity to deliver a scheme that will remove the capacity bottleneck prior to the 2012 Olympics.

- 7.2 Given the significance of Gatwick Airport as an international gateway and the importance of the Brighton Main Line as part of one of the regional spokes it is recommended that the Board add this proposal to the list of regionally significant schemes that it champions.

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