

To: Oxfordshire Growth Board

Date: 30 November 2017

Title of Report: Public participation - requests to address the meeting and questions submitted have been listed in the order submitted.

Introduction

1. Members of the public can address or ask questions of the Oxfordshire Growth Board.
2. Addresses and questions submitted by the deadline are listed below in strict order of receipt by the host authority.
3. Where written responses are available, these will be circulated at the meeting. The Chair may give a verbal response in place of or in addition to this. If no response is available for the meeting a written response will be sent and circulated to all Board members within ten working days of the meeting.

Addresses and questions

1. Colin Thomas on behalf of CPRE Oxfordshire - Question

As you already know the National Infrastructure Commission (NIC) published its “Partnering for Prosperity” report on the 17 November and indeed from the agenda I can see that you are about to hear further details from Mr Hindle.

You are also aware that current activity now passes to Highways England who are intending to publish by July 2018 their decision which of the three corridors, set out in the NIC report, will be chosen to be the focus of large scale development and accommodate the Oxford – Cambridge Expressway.

Highways England intends that there will not be any form of public consultation or Public Inquiry into the need for any such corridor or the choice of which corridor. Consultation will only concern the detail of the chosen route for the Expressway within that corridor after it has been decided.

Whilst the Campaign to Protect Rural England supports the early completion of East – West Rail it opposes in principle the corridor and the highly damaging Expressway which brings with it the potential for 10,000 houses per mile of the route. The lack of public consultation, and particularly the intention to make the decision “behind closed doors” is, wholly unacceptable. CPRE Oxfordshire believe it is essential to open Government that important matters such as the choice of corridor are made by a transparent process and with public involvement. This approach could absolve authorities and elected representatives from accusations of complicity or failure to do their duty which has already been a concern raised by some.

I am delighted to say that CPRE Oxfordshire agrees with Councillor Hudspeth, Leader of Oxfordshire County Council, who has been reported as saying that any decision to impose a Growth Corridor on rural Oxfordshire will be contentious to say the least; he also accepts, that any of the potential Expressway routes – including upgrading the A34 – will be environmentally harmful, albeit to varying degrees.

CPRE Oxfordshire therefore asks you to confirm that as the Leaders of the Local Authorities concerned you will provide a mechanism to ensure that the public can participate in this momentous decision by creating a full statutory public consultation process at which the environmental and social costs of the Growth Corridor can be compared objectively against the potential economic benefits envisaged.

In addition, will you openly call upon Government to conduct a Public Inquiry on the need for and choice of corridor?

Response from Cllr Price

Thank you for your question

As the questioner is aware the Growth Board is neither the decision making body, nor is it the consulting body for the Expressway.

Notwithstanding this, as the Growth Board understands it, there are two stages to the process that Highways England has outlined for selecting a preferred route for the Oxford- Cambridge Expressway:

- Firstly, an assessment of the (three) corridors being considered between Oxford and Milton Keynes, a process which includes stakeholder engagement (but not full public consultation), with a preferred corridor to be identified by summer 2018
- Secondly, an assessment and shortlisting of route options within the preferred corridor, which does include public consultation, leading to a preferred route being identified by Autumn 2020.

The Board's understanding is that there would most likely be a public inquiry into the scheme proposal once the route has been selected and the relevant powers sought. This would be followed by a Transport & Works Act Order, which would encompass all planning and other permissions required.

The Growth Board agrees that it would be helpful if the first stage of the selection process included a fuller more public consultation. This should however be commissioned by Highways England rather than the Growth Board, not least because the corridor is not confined to Oxfordshire. We would suggest therefore that interested parties should make this point direct via the initial engagement process and the growth Board will endorse that proposal with a letter to the Minister and the Agency Chief Executive.

2. Mr Michael Tyce, CPRE Oxfordshire Trustee - Address

In summary the address covered:

The Autumn budget set out plans for 100,000 houses, more than Oxfordshire needs, and the Board had embraced the idea of the expressway. The housing was far in excess of the county's requirements and would be for London commuters, not local

employment, and the rate of population growth for the next 40 years double that of the last 40 years. Why did the Board want to rush towards an industrialised built up hub, requiring building on the Green Belt and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty? Have you asked the residents what they want? Why does Oxford not use its land for high density housing to reduce the need to take land and reduce commuting? Why was there a rush to build?

Response from Cllr Price

The housing numbers of 100,000 recognised the figures in current and in-preparation Local Plans. The Board and the Budget recognised the need for growth and development and the need to have the infrastructure to support this. the funding was not sufficient in itself but hopefully the remainder would be forthcoming from different sources.

Growth Board 30 November 2017
Public participation
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