

LANCASHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

CALLED IN PLANNING APPLICATION FOR PROPOSED HEYSHAM TO M6 LINK ROAD

LAND TO THE NORTH OF LANCASTER BEGINNING AT THE
END OF THE A683 HEYSHAM TO M6 LINK PHASE 1 AND
RUNNING IN AN EASTERLY DIRECTION TO CONNECT WITH
THE M6 AT JUNCTION 34 OF THE M6

Planning Inspectorate reference:
APP/Q2371/N/07/1200928 and
APP/Q2371/N/07/1200929

LPA reference:
01/05/1584

PROOF OF EVIDENCE - SUMMARY STEVEN MCCREESH

Group Engineer Roads

Highway Scheme Details

June 2007

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 I am Steven McCreesh employed as a Group Engineer, Roads, by Lancashire County Council in the Roads Division of the Highways and Environmental Management Section of the Environment Directorate. I have a Bachelor of Science Degree in Civil Engineering and am a Chartered Engineer and Member of the Institution of Civil Engineers. I have thirty-one years experience in highway design and supervision. In my evidence, I shall consider the background and history of the scheme leading up to the current status.

2 DESCRIPTION OF THE SCHEME

2.1 Lancashire County Council has consistently promoted a link between Heysham and the M6 Motorway to improve the inter-urban road network, provide for future development within the District of Lancaster and improve the access to the Port of Heysham.

2.2 A detailed description of the scheme is included in the Environmental Statement, Volume 1, Part A – Report, which accompanied the Planning Application in December 2005. Further amendments are in the Response to Objections and Comments, June 2006 and the Revised Planning Application Report, September 2006.

2.3 The 5.7km long existing section of the ultimate 10.5km long Heysham to M6 Link was opened in July 1994. The proposed route runs from west to east from the existing section of the Link through to the M6 at Junction 34.

3 NEED FOR THE SCHEME

3.1 The justification and purposes of the Link have been tested and revised over the last two decades through Structure and Local Transport Plans together with reviews and studies carried out by the County Council and other parties.

3.2 Studies have concluded that no single measure could resolve or even contain traffic congestion and a variety of inter-related measures were required including a road linking the peninsula with the M6.

3.3 The purposes of the Link are:

- a. To improve communications between Morecambe and Heysham and the M6 Motorway, including improving the access to Heysham Port.
- b. To remove a significant volume of traffic from the River Lune Bridges in Lancaster.
- c. To create opportunities for the enhancement of alternative travel modes by relieving the current traffic conditions.
- d. To facilitate industrial and commercial regeneration.

3.4 The primary purpose is the improvement of communications between the M6 Motorway and the Morecambe-Heysham peninsula. Satisfying this requirement would substantially fulfil the remaining purposes.

- 3.5 The Port of Heysham is classed as a major port and is currently expanding. The completion of the M6 Link will provide a direct route between the Port and the M6. One of the recommendations of the Eddington Transport Study was that surface access to ports such as Heysham should be improved as they are the places where transport constraints have significant potential to hold back economic growth and therefore damage sustainability.
- 3.6 The Examination in Public into the Regional Spatial Strategy recommended to “improve surface access at key national and international gateways” and further stated that “road access into the Port of Heysham is by means of an unsatisfactory route that passes through the urban area of Lancaster with adverse effects on congestion and amenities.”
- 3.7 Lancashire County Council and Lancaster City Council continue to promote a package of sustainable transport measures for Lancaster. These include quality bus, bus priority measures, pedestrian and cycle routes, travel time information systems, safer routes to school and intelligent transport systems. However the Link is still required as well to improve the strategic access to Morecambe, Heysham and its Port.
- 3.8 The Link is forecast to reduce traffic levels and congestion on existing roads serving the Morecambe-Heysham peninsula. This should result in reduced congestion and rat running on many routes and this would create further opportunities to enhance alternative travel modes in Lancaster.

- 3.9 A new unbroken cycle/footway would be provided along most of the proposed Heysham to M6 Link providing connections to the local network. An ideal location for a Park and Ride site lies between the proposed northbound off slip and the M6 at Junction 34. The facility will have 630 spaces and is 3 kilometres to the city centre with frequent buses.
- 3.10 To support the Major Scheme Business Case at Programme Entry submitted to the Department for Transport in July 2005, the County Council commissioned Faber Maunsell to carry out an Economic Impact Report, which was updated in December 2006. It shows that by improving access to the peninsula, the Link would facilitate industrial and commercial regeneration, by encouraging new business and improving the viability of existing businesses.
- 3.11 Lancaster and Morecambe Vision Board state the importance of the Link in their June 2006 publication. This public/private partnership stated “Two of these transformational projects, relating to the implementation of the Morecambe/Heysham-M6 Link and an integrated transport solution for the district, however, go beyond being ‘transformational’. They are truly ‘deal-breakers’ meaning that if they are not addressed, Lancaster and Morecambe will forever under-perform and function at a sub-critical level.”
- 3.12 The Vision Board also stated that the Link Road is a “once in a lifetime opportunity to implement parallel initiatives to ensure that road congestion does not build back up to present levels. Joined-up integrated thinking is imperative when it comes to transport.”

4. CONSIDERATION OF ALTERNATIVES

4.1 As well as proposing to complete the Link, the County Council aims to continue to deliver a Sustainable Transport Package that addresses the priorities of congestion, accessibility, air quality and safety. The majority of the package would be delivered before the completion of the Link, but some of the proposals would be in conjunction with the scheme. An integrated approach has been adopted focused on making best use of existing infrastructure and developing alternatives to road traffic.

4.2 Light rail or tramway has been considered but regrettably discounted due to poor value for money and negative effect on the existing public transport system. With regard to railway, market forces dictate that the most economic options are pursued and, for the Port of Heysham, this means road transport.

5 HISTORY OF THE SCHEME AND CURRENT STATUS

5.1 A connection between Morecambe Road and a North-South Lancaster Bypass, now the M6 Motorway, was proposed in 1949 in the publication "Road Plan for Lancashire". A route north of Lancaster between the M6 Motorway and the Morecambe and Heysham area was a concept in the 1950s during the development of Lancaster Bypass. As a result, land alongside the Lancaster and Morecambe College has been protected historically for highway purposes.

5.2 In 1985 a study examined the possibility of a Western Bypass and this was selected as the basis for the route to be taken forward.

- 5.3 There has always been overwhelming support within the Lancaster area for the completion of the Link and support for the alternative alignments has always been about equal. Whilst the County Council supported the Western Route, independent evaluation via the Structure and Local Plan examinations criticised this choice of route on the grounds of ecology, visual impact, additional cost and reduced benefits, stating that whilst a link was required, the Northern Route was the better option.
- 5.4 Following further environmental assessment, legal advice was that the choice of the Western Route was “not only extraordinary but one that was perverse on the part of the County Council” and that such a decision would be “lacking in logic and one that no reasonable planning authority properly directing itself could come to”. The County Council subsequently promoted the Northern Route taking the view that the Western Route was unbuildable.
- 5.5 In my opinion, the proposed Heysham to M6 Link is the most sustainable route, the only route that can be built and the optimum alignment that minimises impact on existing development.
- 5.6 In July 2005 the North West Regional Assembly Government Office for the North West and other partners, conducted a prioritisation process, which recommended the scheme for funding although it was classed as “not yet approved”.
- 5.7 As a large authority, the County Council is covering the development costs. There is no infrastructure development directly linked to the road and therefore no private funding available.

- 5.8 After the original estimate of £87.7m was produced, changes have been made including sliproad modifications and the Park and Ride facility. Therefore the cost estimate has been updated to a January 2006 price of £106m including a construction inflation figure of 6% per annum
- 5.9 Using the current spend profile in the Regional Funding Allocation, the estimate of actual build cost will be between £118m, based on 2.5% inflation, and £138m, based on 6% inflation.
- 5.10 The Regional Prioritisation process set the start of construction at early 2010 to comply with the predicted annual Regional Funding Allocation. The current programmed start of construction is January 2010 with completion in mid 2012.
- 5.11 Morecambe has been designated as a regeneration priority area. In their Local Plan 1996-2006, Lancaster City Council “supports the completion of the Heysham – M6 Link Road as a matter of priority”.
- 5.12 In the Regional Planning Guidance for the North West, March 2003, RPG 13, the scheme has been identified as a regionally significant transport link and the Port of Heysham is listed as a regional gateway and interchange. RPG 13 became the Regional Spatial Strategy in September 2004 and is part of the Statutory Development Plan.
- 5.13 The scheme has been part of the County Council’s highway strategy for over 50 years. It has been scrutinised at Public Consultations/Exhibitions, Examinations in Public and Public Inquiries and subsequently amended. The scheme as a result is the most appropriate and sustainable.

- 5.14 Lancashire County Council is committed to working with the Department for Transport, Lancaster City Council and all the other Statutory Bodies to ensure that this much needed major highway scheme is delivered for the people of Lancaster, Morecambe and Heysham as soon as possible.
- 5.15 If the Link was not completed, then congestion will get worse, opportunities to promote public transport, cycling and walking will be lost and the decline in industry and commerce in the area will continue. It could be said that the residents of Lancaster, and especially Heysham and Morecambe, have been waiting over 50 years for this link road. It is needed to finally fully connect the Heysham and Morecambe Peninsula with the outside world.