

East Kent Access

A report by the Head of Transport Management to the Dover Joint Transportation Board on 8 September 2003.

Introduction

A256 East Kent Access Phase 1

(see Figure 1 attached)

1. Phase 1 received Provisional Acceptance from Government in December 2000. Phase 1A & 1B achieved statutory approvals in 2002 but Government has been unable procedurally to release funding to allow these elements to proceed in advance of Phase 1C completing its statutory procedures.
2. All parties have been working hard to overcome this hurdle and to achieve the early start that all involved in East Kent and the Strategic Partnership consider so important. A successful mechanism has been found using an arrangement of a SEEDA loan and other temporary funding resources to allow Phases 1A & 1B to proceed.
3. Conventional Local Transport Plan funding that will also allow repayment of this temporary borrowing, will come on stream when Phase 1C has completed its statutory approvals and Government have given Full Acceptance to funding. This approach was taken to achieve the wider objectives of making a start on the scheme to support commerce and encourage the economic regeneration of East Kent. The County Council's Cabinet Member for Finance took this key decision to proceed as a matter of urgency after consultation with the opposition Leaders and Chairman of Scrutiny Committee.
4. The contract for Phase 1 was awarded to May Gurney and a formal start was made in early August. Completion is expected in Spring 2004. The delay in award has lost valuable mobilisation and planning time but considerable effort has been made to achieve a start, as soon as possible after the Open Golf, as originally intended. At the time of writing this Report, the contractor has not finalised arrangements for the location of the site offices and compound.
5. An exhibition to remind local people about the scheme and imminent start of construction, and an opportunity to introduce the contractor was held in the Sandwich Guildhall on 14 July. Every effort will be made to maintain good communications with local people and road users during the works.
6. Phase 1C obtained planning consent in July, 2003. The Compulsory Purchase Order and Side Road Order are expected to be published in September, 2003. It is hoped that a public inquiry will not be necessary so that construction by May Gurney can start in 2004 following on from the completion of Phase 1A & 1B. However, the issues relating to the replacement sluice gates and utility diversions at Stonar Cut are complex and may also influence the programme.

Phase 2

(see Figure 2 attached)

7. The preferred scheme was adopted in September 2002 after a review of the route standard and alignment following earlier consultation. A recent assessment has indicated that the scheme is estimated to cost in order of £50 –60m.
8. It had been intended to submit a bid for funding in the Local Transport Plan Annual Progress Report submission in July 2003. However, new guidance issued by Government in April now requires a far more onerous assessment process than before. In addition to a detailed assessment of the adopted scheme, Government now also require an assessment, to the same level, of what is called a 'credible lower cost alternative' and a 'next best' scheme. For a scheme of this complexity it was unrealistic to submit a robust bid in the time available.
9. Government have always said that it will assess schemes across a broad range of criteria but it is clear from the experience on Phase 1 and other schemes that they still put most emphasis on the narrow traffic economic benefits and a significant positive return on the scheme cost. Scheme bids have to compete nationally for a limited funding pot and value for money is key to the Treasury.
10. Phase 2 provides a high standard of road and improved traffic movement and safety. However, because of the route imposed by the physical and environmental constraints at Cliffs End, journey distances will be longer and that will undermine the other traffic benefits. With the high capital cost, the value for money case based on traffic alone will inevitably be weak.
11. It is therefore vital that the wider commercial, economic regeneration and social benefits of Phase 2 to East Kent are a key element of a funding bid in July 2004. Independent consultants are likely to be commissioned to pull together the wider sub-regional economic and social case for the scheme.

Conclusion

This Report is for information only.

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Background Documents

None