



Department for Transport

From the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State
Richard Holden MP

Great Minster House
33 Horseferry Road
London
SW1P 4DR

Tel: 0300 330 3000
E-Mail: richard.holden@dft.gov.uk

Web site: www.gov.uk/dft

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Dear Colleague,

Following the briefing session on the M4 to Dorset Coast study on 25 January, I am writing to all colleagues who were invited to the session, so that those who were unable to attend are also up to date with progress on this.

As you are aware, since early 2022, National Highways has been conducting a detailed study to establish the most suitable potential routes to improve strategic highway connectivity between the M4 motorway and the Dorset Coast. The need for the study was identified as part of the Roads Investment Strategy 2 (RIS2), and the work is now close to completion. Work to date has been undertaken with the purpose of:

- Identifying which road corridor should form the main strategic north-south route;
- Establishing what improvements could be made to the road network to provide a high-quality link;
- Understanding what consideration may need to be given to trunking or detrunking; and
- Identifying supporting measures (e.g. public transport, active travel) should be considered.

Through our work to date, we have assessed a number of different road corridors, both on the Strategic Road Network and Major Road Network, that could offer improved connectivity across the region. These are presented in the below map.



A number of key findings have emerged from our work to date, these include:

- The road network in the study area is underperforming and connectivity within this area is relatively poor;
- Alongside any improvements to north-south connectivity there is a need to improve the east to west Dorset Coast Route; and
- Wider 'last mile' improvements are needed at the southern extent of the study area to enable access to key locations including ports and airports.

The study has developed a long list of potential road improvements, building where appropriate, on previous work and known schemes. These highway interventions focus on addressing key 'pinch point' delay locations, and active travel and multi-modal travel measures are also being developed to improve local and strategic connectivity.

We have not yet finalised the recommendations and outputs of the study, however we have formed some emerging conclusions from our work to date and these are set out below:

- We do not consider that either the A338/A346 north of Salisbury or the A350 south of Warminster will form part of the main north-south strategic corridor due to significant interventions being required, some of which would significantly impact on Area of Outstanding National Beauty (AONB), Ministry of Defence and National Trust. Furthermore, there would be significant cost and deliverability challenges associated with these environmental constraints, with 90% of the A350, and 53% of the A338 route being through or adjacent to an AONB.
- At the northern end of the study area, we are considering routes via Bath (A46 / A36) and Chippenham (A350). The emerging findings are that the routes via Chippenham deliver greater strategic benefits and have fewer deliverability challenges but are higher cost.
- Notwithstanding this, all routes under consideration have delivery challenges, with a number of locations (Bath, Salisbury, Westbury) where schemes have not been progressed in the past due to both environmental challenges and public concern.

Over the months we will be finalising our conclusions and will look to recommend a preferred corridor (or corridors) to deliver strategic north-south connectivity across the region, as well as setting out potential network enhancements which could support these strategic movements. Subject to agreement; network enhancements will need to be taken through further detailed development in their own right at a later date.

As recognised by RIS2, the main delivery of interventions identified is likely to take place after the completion of the dualling of the A303 / A358, which is currently anticipated to be after Roads Period 3 (2025-2030).

National Highways can provide individual briefings on work to date and emerging findings, if this is of interest, please contact the team at the below study e-mail to arrange M4toDorsetCoastConnectivityStudy@nationalhighways.co.uk.

I will also arrange another briefing session in a few months to take you through the study recommendations and next steps.

In the meantime, if you have any questions, please get in touch and I will be happy to provide you with further information.

Best Wishes,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'R Holden', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

RICHARD HOLDEN MP

MINISTER FOR ROADS AND LOCAL TRANSPORT