

Report to Communities, Highways and Environment Scrutiny Committee

2 March 2022

Review of the Highways Improvement Programme

Report by Director of Highways, Transport and Planning/Head of Local Highway Operations

Electoral divisions: All

Summary

The Highway Improvement Programme, mainly funded by the Integrated Transport Block Allocation and developer contributions, is made up of several thematic programmes e.g., Community Highway Schemes and Local Transport Improvements. Each of the thematic programmes are developed independently and fed through for inclusion in the Approved Delivery Programme each Autumn before being approved by the Cabinet Member in January and delivered the following financial year.

A project was commissioned in September 2021 to review how schemes in the Highways Improvement Programme are identified, prioritised, developed and delivered. This report outlines the scope of the project and seeks views from the Committee on the key aspects: Prioritisation, Working with Communities and Faster Delivery.

Focus for Scrutiny

The Communities, Highways and Environment Scrutiny Committee is asked for its feedback on the initial draft proposals emerging as part of the review, outlined in Section 2 of the report.

Specifically, officers would be interested to learn Members' views on:

- a. The draft Assessment Framework. Do Members believe the correct aspects are being included?
- b. Use of the Assessment Framework to prioritise work across the Highway Improvement Programme. Do Members support the programme wide approach?
- c. Use of the Assessment Framework to review historic s106 agreements and associated schemes. Do Members believe this is a suitable mechanism to review the s106 pipeline schemes to ensure they are still fit for purpose?
- d. The single point of entry to deliver a capital improvement scheme for Communities. Do Members support this approach?

- e. The options for delivery of smaller scale, simple schemes. Do Members support the development of a mechanism for Communities to deliver works themselves?
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Proposal

1 Background and context

- 1.1 In March 2019 the Environment and Communities and Fire Select Committee considered the Highway Improvement Programme and several areas were identified for review or improvement.
- 1.2 The work to progress these improvements had been on hold, but a project was commissioned in September 2021 to take the review forward. This report outlines the scope of the project and seeks views from the Committee on key aspects.
- 1.3 The Highway Improvement Programme, mainly funded by the capital Integrated Transport Block Allocation and developer contributions, is made up of several thematic programmes. These programmes are varied and comprise the Strategic Transport Improvements Programme, (STIP), Community Highway Schemes, (CHS), Local Transport Improvements Programme, (LTIP), Public Rights of Way, Walking and Cycling Schemes, Road Safety Schemes and Bus Infrastructure.
- 1.4 Alongside the Integrated Transport Block, unexpected external funding opportunities, e.g. the Active Travel Fund, can require officers to develop programmes that specifically align to funding criteria. These may or may not include schemes that have already been developed for the Highway Improvement Programme.
- 1.5 Each of the thematic programmes are developed independently and fed through for inclusion in the Approved Delivery Programme each Autumn before being approved by the Cabinet Member in January.
- 1.6 Initial scoping at the beginning of Review of the Highways Improvement Programme concluded that work should focus on six key areas;
- Prioritisation
 - Working with Communities
 - Funding
 - Faster Delivery
 - Internal Working Practices
 - Programme/Project Management
- 1.7 This report seeks input into the Prioritisation, Working with Communities and Faster Delivery workstreams.

Prioritisation

- 1.8 There are a variety of approaches to prioritising projects within the Highways Improvement Programme. This is, in part, due to the varying nature of the schemes and the existence of some national guidance. However, it would be beneficial to be able to compare schemes against each other when they are being funded from the same budgets to ensure the County Council is delivering projects that maximise delivery against its objectives and priorities.
- 1.9 Assessment of schemes and subsequent prioritisation should ensure schemes are aligned with corporate priorities, including the West Sussex Transport Plan, deliver value for money, are deliverable and meet all necessary technical thresholds e.g. PV² (Pedestrian/Vehicle movements) for signalised crossings. Any schemes that are submitted as part of external funding bids should also meet the agreed thresholds to ensure that all work delivered on the ground is delivering West Sussex County Council priorities.
- 1.10 Work has been completed to develop a new draft Assessment Framework that can be used on all schemes within the Highways Improvement Programme.

Working with Communities

- 1.11 Currently there are several ways parties outside of the County Council can make requests for improvements on the Highway. Understandably this can cause confusion and frustration for the applicant and gives the appearance of the County Council not having a joined-up approach to Highway Improvements.
- 1.12 This work has provided an opportunity to examine the way we work with Communities when they wish to fund and deliver works on the highway using their own contractors. There are examples of this happening through programmes such as Operation Watershed so consideration is being given to whether these arrangements could be extended further.

Faster Delivery

- 1.13 There is a level of frustration that relatively simple schemes can take 2 to 3 years to deliver. Work has been completed separately to improve the Community TRO process but there are currently other schemes that could be delivered in a shorter timeframe if the mechanisms were in place. For example, a batch of TROs or some small infrastructure improvements.
- 1.14 The majority of schemes in the programme are designed in one year and built the following year. Whilst this is necessary for most schemes, due to the complexity of the work, if an application is made for a Community Highway Scheme just after the cut off deadline, it can take three years before works happen on the ground. However, it might be possible for some of the smaller schemes to, subject to contractual arrangements and availability of road space, be delivered in one year.

2 Initial proposals for consideration/comment

Prioritisation

- 2.1 A new draft Assessment Framework is being developed for use across the whole of the Highways Improvement Programme. The introduction of a consistent approach to scheme assessment will mean schemes can be compared against

one another more easily to ensure the County Council is investing in work that delivers the maximum benefits.

2.2 The initial assessments will also provide an opportunity to filter out schemes that, for one reason or another, are very unlikely to be feasible. For example, the required land may not be available, or the scheme is not technically possible. The assessment will also allow us to review historic s106 agreements to make an informed decision on the viability of the associated schemes.

2.3 The assessment considers a number of areas as outlined below:

- Safety: impact the scheme may have on people being killed or seriously injured in road traffic accidents, perception of safety in the area
- Active Travel: increased opportunities for walking, cycling and horse riding in the area and access to green spaces
- Feasibility/Deliverability: whole life costs, land matters, benefit cost ratios, technical assessments, stakeholder support etc
- Alignment with Policy/Plans: Local Plans, Neighbourhood Plans, West Sussex Transport Plan
- Impact on Transport Users: Public Transport, Network Connectivity, Electric Vehicle Infrastructure opportunities, Congestion and journey times
- Funding: external funding availability and opportunities for income generations
- Environmental: net impact on factors such as carbon, landscape, biodiversity etc
- Economy: contribution to key factors such as town centre vibrancy, tourism, development and themes within the WSCC Economy Plan
- Social: Community severance, accommodating demographic change, public health etc.

Working with Communities

2.4 It is recommended that one point of entry be developed for applicants who wish to make a change on the highway. This, more user-friendly approach, would allow the applicant to submit one application that would be assessed internally. Feedback can then be given on how their scheme will be assessed/delivered and the associated timescales.

2.5 It has also been recognised that earlier involvement of engineering specialisms in the development of Community Highway Schemes will avoid last minute changes to schemes as part of the moderation process. This in turn will prevent disappointment when communities learn later in the process that their aspirations were not technically feasible, and will encourage a co-design approach between applicants and engineers

Faster Delivery

- 2.6 The County Council, on occasion, is approached by community groups who have the desire and funding to deliver small scale improvements in their area, such as short stretches of footway extension. Work is being undertaken to explore how those groups might be able to deliver works with their own contractors, similar to the delivery of Operation Watershed schemes.
- 2.7 Whilst the vast majority of the Highways Improvement Programme will take two years to deliver due to the complexity of the schemes, there are a handful of schemes each year that could be delivered in one year. For these schemes, it is recommended that they be delivered through the County Council's existing Frameworks as a small programme of works.
- 2.8 It is important to note that a preliminary assessment would be required at the beginning of any such scheme to make sure it could be delivered in one year. It will not be possible to simply 'fast track' schemes the applicant believes to be simple as this will be very likely to cause delays and potential cost uncertainties if the necessary design work is not fully completed. All this information will be made available on the County Council's website so expectations are managed from the beginning.

3 Consultation, engagement and advice

- 3.1 The review has been completed in consultation with officers across Highways, Transport and Planning to ensure any recommendations are fit for purpose and built on experience and learning.
- 3.2 The Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport has been kept informed of the developing proposals and supports the work completed to date. Should the new approaches outlined in this report be introduced, a Cabinet Member decision will be taken in April 2022.
- 3.3 The Communities, Highways and Environment Scrutiny Committee is asked for their feedback on the draft proposals as part of the review.
- 3.4 Specifically, officers would be interested to learn Members' views on:
- a. The draft Assessment Framework. Do Members believe the correct aspects are being included?
 - b. Use of the Assessment Framework to prioritise work across the Highway Improvement Programme. Do Members support the programme wide approach, recognising this may result in a change in the spread of investment across the thematic programmes? For example, the number of Community Highway Schemes may vary each year according to their relative priority against other schemes
 - c. Use of the Assessment Framework to review historic s106 agreements and associated schemes. Do Members believe this is a suitable mechanism to review the s106 pipeline schemes to ensure they are still fit for purpose?
 - d. The single point of entry to deliver a capital improvement scheme for Communities. Do Members support this approach?

- e. The options for delivery of smaller scale simple schemes. Do Members support the development of a mechanism for Communities to deliver works themselves?

4 Finance

- 4.1 The recommended changes to the way schemes are prioritised and delivered will have no additional financial implications. The Assessment Framework will ensure the capital Highway Improvement Programme is made up of schemes that deliver best value for West Sussex.

5 Risk implications and mitigations

Risk	Mitigating Action (in place or planned)
Third parties commissioning works on the highway may result in work of sub-standard working practices or outputs	<p>Agreements will be put in place with community groups ensuring appropriate insurances and supervision is in place prior to works commencing.</p> <p>Designs for works on the highway to be agreed by officers</p>
Expectations of applicants will not be met when they submit requests for Community Highway Schemes. Either because they are not delivered in one year, or not prioritised	<p>Improved information on the website will clearly explain the process of assessment and the type of schemes that can be delivered in one year</p> <p>Earlier involvement of the engineering specialism will encourage a collaborative approach to the development of schemes</p>
Increased demand for small scale improvements requires increased resourcing	<p>Historic programmes are being reviewed to better understand the potential scale of any such programme in the future</p> <p>Moving forward, resourcing will be considered annually in the development of the programme</p>

6 Policy alignment and compliance

- 6.1 The new draft Assessment Framework aligns to National and Local policy where applicable inc the West Sussex Transport Plan.

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Background papers

[Highway and Transport Improvement Schemes – Report to Select Committee March 2019](#)