

Bexhill to Hastings Link Road

Chapter 2: Purpose of the Scheme

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2 Purpose of the Scheme

2.1 Introduction

2.1.1 The Scheme submission bid to the Department for Transport in 2004 set out the justification for the Scheme which was driven by existing socio-economic, transportation and environmental problems in the area. Since 2001, following the Secretary of State's conclusions on the *Access to Hastings Study* that transport investment was important to the regeneration of Hastings and needed to be integrated within a wider regeneration strategy, consensus has emerged across the main strategic plans (Hastings and Rother District Local Plans, East Sussex County Council (ESCC) Local Transport Plan 2 and Regional Spatial Strategy) over the necessity of the Scheme as an urgent priority for regeneration in these two towns. The Hastings and Bexhill Task Force - made up of all key Government funding agencies and decision makers - launched the Five Point Plan (FPP) in 2002 to provide a comprehensive regeneration strategy for the towns. The Scheme is part of the regeneration agenda for Hastings and Bexhill and forms an integral part of the clearly defined package of regeneration measures promoted by the Task Force.

2.1.2 Poor accessibility between Hastings and Bexhill has been highlighted by the Task Force and other local stakeholders as a major impediment to improving the economic integration of the two towns and represents a growing problem to both the business and resident communities. The Scheme would provide a second link between the two towns (the other being the existing A259 coast road), from its junction with the A269 London Road in Bexhill to Queensway on the western fringe of Hastings, and ultimately a connection to the A21 Trunk Road. The Scheme would also be a critical factor in unlocking major employment and housing land allocations in north Bexhill. The North East Bexhill Development site is seen as a key to delivering the economic development potential in the Hastings and Rother area. This cannot be achieved without the Scheme due to the capacity constraints on the local road network and on the A259 coast road between the two towns. Good access between Hastings and north-east Bexhill is vital to ensure that Hastings would have a strong relationship with the development.

2.1.3 The North East Bexhill Development is central to Rother District Local Plan's development strategy. The Local Plan sees this strategic allocation as a priority and sees the area as a potential focus for sustainable growth, and helping to meet future workforce needs. The Hastings Local Plan lays down that with existing employment land in Hastings Borough nearly all taken up, the most important new land release within the Hastings area would be the North Bexhill Business Park. Moreover, without the Scheme providing the necessary additional road capacity through relieving congestion at Glyne Gap, opportunities for further strategic development in the area anticipated by the draft South East Plan would not arise. The Scheme is therefore fundamental to meeting the aims and objectives of the County's Structure Plan, Rother District's and Hastings' Local Plans. The Scheme should also be considered in the light of the appropriate transport improvements referred to in the emerging South East Plan. These matters are discussed in detail in Chapter 5: Policy and Planning.

2.1.4 The Local Transport Plan states that the Scheme would help to deliver the County Council's wider transport objectives towards their strategy of achieving a safe, efficient integrated transport system for East Sussex. The Scheme would contribute to resolving existing congestion and air quality issues on the busiest section of the trunk road in the County, at Glyne Gap. An Air Quality Management Area (AQMA) has been declared for the Glyne Gap area, and the Scheme forms a part of the strategy within the Air Quality Action Plan (AQAP) 2005 to address this issue.

2.1.5 Public transport enhancement continues to be a key objective for the two towns. Opportunities for new bus routes between Bexhill and Hastings along the Scheme would be sought as part of S106 agreement with the development of the North East Bexhill site. The additional capacity released on existing routes, particularly along the A259 coast road, would allow implementation of bus priority, which would be implemented through the Local Transport Plan process.

2.1.6 The provision of a Greenway parallel to the Scheme for pedestrians, cyclists and equestrians would provide a main link for non-motorised users following mainly the south side of the Scheme. The Greenway should provide a real benefit for pedestrians, cyclists and recreational users, especially if linked to new or upgraded links within the proposed Pebsham Countryside Park and a wider network of green links as part of a larger aspirational Greenway strategy outlined in *Hastings Greenway: A Strategic Framework* which recommends cycle links at Hastings town centre, the Ore Valley, St Leonards, Hollington and the Conquest Hospital.

2.1.7 The environmental impact of the Scheme on the environmentally sensitive areas of the Combe Haven valley is of significance, and would be minimised through careful mitigation and compensation measures. In addition, there is an outstanding opportunity between Bexhill and St Leonards to create a major Countryside Park to benefit environmental conservation and recreation.

2.1.8 The Scheme incorporates environmental mitigation and compensation measures which are complementary to the proposals for the Pebsham Countryside Park.. Some of the environmental mitigation and compensation measures, which form part of the Scheme, could become a part of the park, if that project is realised but would create a valuable 'green corridor' in their own right.

2.2 Scheme Objectives

2.2.1 The Scheme's key objectives were defined in the Scheme submission bid to the Department for Transport in 2004 and are fully in accordance with transport planning policy at national, regional and local levels. At a national level it accords with the requirements of Planning Policy Guidance (PPG) Note 13 (Transport), March 2001, that development plan allocations and local transport investment and priorities should be closely linked.

2.2.2 At a regional level, the construction of the Scheme was recommended in the South Coast Multi-Modal Study, a recommendation which was subsequently reinforced by the findings of Hastings Strategy Development Plan. At a local level, the Scheme accords with Local Transport Objectives and Rother District and Hastings Local Plans.

2.2.3 Table 2.1 sets out the overall local objectives of the Scheme under the Government's five objectives for transport as outlined in the 1998 White Paper, *A New Deal for Transport: Better for Everyone*.

Table 2.1 Local Objectives for the Scheme

Government Objective	Local Objective
Environment	To reduce emissions of particulates (PM10) along the A259 Bexhill Road, with the aim of reducing concentrations to within the UK air quality objectives for PM ₁₀ and removing the need for the currently designated AQMA.
	To minimise the impact of the Scheme on the environmentally sensitive areas in the Combe Haven valley and to ensure that the number of persons adversely affected by the Scheme is kept as low as possible.
	To ensure that the Scheme is complementary to the future implementation of the proposed Pebsham Countryside Park.
Safety	To reduce the number of accidents on the local road network in general and on the A259 in particular.
Economy	To reduce journey times for all road users and improve reliability of bus services on the local road network.
	To maximise and preserve the benefit from reductions in traffic volume and congestion on the A259 corridor between Bexhill and Hastings for buses by introducing bus priority measures.
	To contribute towards the Five Point Plan for the regeneration of Hastings and Bexhill by improving overall accessibility to employment, education, health, and other opportunities within the local area and thereby contributing to improvement in social inclusion.
	To enable the housing and commercial developments proposed in north Bexhill, which are dependent on construction of the Scheme for planning approval, to be realised.
Accessibility	To reduce community severance in the A259 corridor and in local villages used as rat runs to avoid the A259.
	To improve conditions for pedestrians, cyclists and equestrians on the local road network in general and to facilitate creation of dedicated cycle ways between the two towns.
Integration	To ensure that the Scheme is complementary to future transportation developments in the area.

Source:

ESCC LTP, Annual Progress Report July 2004, Major Scheme Bid: Bexhill to Hastings Link Road, Main Report, Section 2.2

2.2.4 A detailed discussion of how the objectives for the Scheme have been addressed is presented in Chapter 17: Conclusion.

2.3 The Need for the Scheme

Local Economy and Regeneration

2.3.1 The Scheme is important in its regeneration potential and as such it forms part of the clearly defined package of regeneration measures promoted by the Task Force. The socio-economic conditions in Hastings are particularly acute and the Government's Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD 2004) recognise Hastings as one of the most deprived areas in the south-east. In fact, Hastings is the 37th most deprived local authority in England, with super output areas (SOAs) in six of its 16 wards in the 10% most deprived nationally, and a further five wards with SOAs in the 20% most deprived nationally. Sidley in Bexhill is also disadvantaged containing SOAs in the worst 20% nationally.

2.3.2 The Regeneration Statement sets out the current socio-economic conditions and regeneration potential that would be facilitated by the Scheme. The need for regeneration in Hastings and Bexhill is widely acknowledged and has been recognised by the Government as a priority for the region. Hastings is also expected to deliver 4,200 more new dwellings and Rother District 5,600 with 4,000 for the sub-regional part of Rother that is Bexhill and Rye, over the 20 year period to 2026. The expected growth in the number of households in Hastings and Rother would increase the supply of the workforce, the number of potential new business start ups and transport usage. Although car ownership in Hastings is currently low in comparison with the South East¹, this is expected to increase with the planned economic regeneration for the area.

2.3.3 Polices for the two towns identify that it is essential to create and release new employment sites and land as a means of generating employment and regeneration. Poor transport links (especially the highways) are identified as a significant contributor to the economic problems in Hastings, and the transport problems of the areas greatly constrain the improvement of employment opportunities. The sub-regional and local plans identify that improved road links are needed to create a more vibrant enterprise culture in the two towns to allow businesses to trade more widely, local business to expand, and to attract new business into the area. The Scheme fits into those social policy priorities for tackling deprivation, low skills and poor housing in Hastings and Bexhill, through the development possibilities the road provides, increased access to local employment from deprived wards and the creation of an economic circle for local communities

2.3.4 The Hastings and Bexhill Task Force was convened by the South East England Development Agency to bring together a partner led regeneration strategy for the area. The Task Force produced the Five Point Plan (FPP), a major £400 million, 10 year programme of regeneration and investment. Around £35 million is already committed to the area in the period to 2007, mainly under the Single Regeneration Budget, but also from Objective 2 funds and through the Neighbourhood Renewal Programme. The Scheme would be a crucial component of the FPP. Good transport links are seen as vital for attracting businesses, tourism and education institutions. The

¹ 34% of households in Hastings do not own a car compared with 27% nationally and 19% for the South East, 2001 Census data.

Scheme is seen as crucial to open up housing and work opportunities. The FPP identifies that the Scheme would help unemployed residents to access areas of employment and this is an important aspect to restore confidence in the area.

2.3.5 The Task Force also recognises that the strategy would depend on an increasing proportion of the funding coming from the private sector. Success would depend on a strong and positive response from the market and funders. A climate of certainty and confidence is needed with clear and continued commitment demonstrated from the public sector through delivery of key projects. To support this, the Task Force considers that the Scheme is a vital component of its vision to regenerate Hastings and Bexhill. If the FPP is to be delivered, it is going to need transport infrastructure. The Scheme would contribute to that need and put in place a new dynamic for the two towns. This would be vital in releasing new employment and housing land in Bexhill.

2.3.6 The 2005 Annual Business Survey conducted by Sussex Enterprise showed that accessibility remained a key issue for business especially in relation to potential clients accessing their business premises and hence their products. In addition, the shortage of available suitable premises within the area had repercussions on their ability to expand or diversify that could result in them having to move out of the area. A separate study by Vail Williams (2005) showed that East Sussex had less than half of the national average supply of office and commercial/industrial premises per head of working population.

2.3.7 Regional policies are agreed that improvements in transport networks in coastal towns in South East England are critical in order to increase their connectivity with the prosperous parts of the region and thus raise competitiveness. The Scheme is also in keeping with wider commitments to improve other coastal roads, such as the A21 to and A27 in the area. The Sussex Coast sub-regional strategy in the emerging South East Plan acknowledges that no one measure can deliver the overall strategic transport needs of the sub-region and that the Scheme is seen strategically as contributing to the overall approach of progressive improvements to the A259 between Hastings and the A27. Improving the A259 would bring better strategic access to the A21 from Bexhill. This in turn would benefit Battle as this is currently the key route from north Bexhill. The Scheme would free up the A259 seafront route, which would remain the signposted route to the A259 to the east.

Release of Land for Development

2.3.8 The Scheme would enable access to north-east Bexhill, which is allocated in the Rother District Local Plan for development. With the traffic constraint removed, Bexhill becomes one of the two areas in East Sussex capable of accommodating major housing growth important to South East strategic requirements. This land would be developed for office space and residential properties thus increasing both employment and the housing provision in the area. These mixed use developments would provide over 1,000 homes and 48,000m² of commercial and business floor space and are dependent on completion of the Scheme for planning permission.

2.3.9 As well as directly enabling the North East Bexhill Development, relief of traffic congestion in the A259 corridor would enable other regeneration projects to be realised. It is currently difficult to obtain consent for new developments along the A259 due to capacity constraints and existing levels of congestion. The Scheme would also allow further improvements in bus services to be made, both on the new road and on the relieved A259 corridor.

2.3.10 The North East Bexhill Development and its new community would generate its own demand for open space and recreation. The proposed development of a countryside park at Pebsham is currently constrained by access. To achieve its full potential, the proposal is dependent on the Scheme relieving the existing A259, not only to enable the development of the proposed park, but also to encourage a wider sphere of interest in order to lever in commercial funding to facilitate development of recreational facilities for the area.

Traffic and Local Environmental Issues

2.3.11 The A27/A259 is the principal east-west route for the East Sussex Area, and is the only direct route between Bexhill and Hastings. The A259 corridor, in particular through Glyne Gap, suffers from traffic congestion, poor bus reliability, community severance, poor pedestrian and cycle provision and a high accident rate. The Scheme is a project that has been developed by ESCC to relieve congestion and reliability pressures on the A259 at Glyne Gap and its approaches, which are found to be at capacity. This is defined in technical highway terms, but can also be evidenced by people's daily experiences travelling along the A259. It is inevitable that this situation would continue to worsen, without action, as traffic increases through general traffic growth, some additional economic regeneration of the towns and committed development levels.

2.3.12 The problem is not confined to the A259 corridor, but impacts much further afield, as many people take alternative and quite unsuitable routes to avoid congestion in the area. The congestion problems on the A259 leads to high volumes of traffic using unsuitable roads, through some of the rural villages and Battle, and adding to the environmental impact that these settlements suffer. Origin-Destination surveys carried out in 2004 suggest that some 50% of the daily traffic travelling along the unclassified road running from Catsfield through Crowhurst to join the B2092 is travelling between Bexhill and Hastings or to and from places beyond the two towns.

2.3.13 The Highways Agency commissioned consultants Parsons Brinckerhoff Limited in 2002 to carry out a brief review of the A259 trunk road corridor within Bexhill and Hastings and identify a programme of small-scale highway improvements, that would enable sites allocated for development within the Rother District and Hastings Local Plans to come forward. The report identified A259/A269 Glyne Gap roundabout as a major bottleneck, and that after 2006, in the absence of the Scheme, major improvements would be required to the Glyne Gap junction to help accommodate release of new development identified within the Local Plans.

2.3.14 An additional more recent impetus for the project has been the identification of air quality problems along the A259 Bexhill Road on the coastal strip between the two towns. This work has shown that air quality objectives for particulate matter have been breached in the area, necessitating an AQAP and mitigation measures. The corridor is designated as an AQMA and a draft Action Plan was adopted in October 2005 by Hastings Borough Council (HBC) and is in the process of implementation. The draft Action Plan states that the construction of the Scheme is the action with the greatest impacts to reduce PM₁₀ emissions within the AQMA. Monitoring by HBC is currently underway to confirm source apportionment; whilst PM₁₀ levels are largely dominated by background sources, the Scheme would constitute a principal management measure.