

A303/A30/A358 Corridor Feasibility Study

Background

Following the 2013 Spending Review, the Government announced plans for the biggest ever upgrade of our strategic roads network. Government has also committed to carrying out a number of feasibility studies to tackle some of the most notorious road hot spots in the country.

The feasibility studies will look at these problems in detail and identify potential schemes to solve them. They will be progressed alongside the Highways Agency's Route Based Strategy programme which is considering the current and future performance of the network. When taken together they will inform future roads investment decisions as part of the Roads Investment Strategy development process.

The A303/A30/A358 corridor

The A303 corridor provides an important role in connecting the South East and South West regions. It is dualled over much of its length but between the M3 motorway, A358 and A30 there remain several unimproved single carriageway sections which cause congestion, especially during summer weekends.

Given the history of progress with investment proposals in the A303 corridor, at the time of the 2010 Spending Review, the Government did not have sufficiently developed business cases for investment proposals to be able to confirm specific investment projects in the A303 corridor.

Somerset County Council held a summit with other relevant stakeholders in 2012 the outcome of which was a commitment by the region for further work on the relative prioritisation of potential interventions and consideration of possible funding avenues. The grouping of local authorities and Local Enterprise Partnerships produced an initial analysis and business case for future improvements to the A303 corridor, to reiterate the importance of investment in the corridor, particularly the wider economic benefits to the South West economy.

The Department for Transport and the Highways Agency have worked closely with the South West local authorities on the details of the analysis and business case for potential investment, providing assistance and views on the methodology adopted and views on what further analysis may be necessary.

Study Aims and Objectives

The aim of the study is to identify the opportunities and understand the case for future investment solutions on the A303/A30/A358 corridor that are deliverable, affordable and offer value for money.

The specific objectives of the study are to:

- Identify and assess the case, deliverability and timing of specific road investments that address existing problems on the A303 corridor.
- Understand the balance of benefits and impacts from potential individual investment proposals and any additional benefits or impacts from investment on corridor basis.
- Evidence where possible, the wider economic benefits from the road investment in the corridor.
- Understand the impacts of potential investment in the A303 corridor on the performance of other road transport corridors to the South West region.
- Understand the impacts of the proposed investment in the A303 corridor on the resilience of the road transport network.

Geographic and modal scope

The proposed geographic scope of the study should consider the length of the A303/A30 corridor from the junction between the A303 and M3 in the east to the junction between the A30 and the M5 in the west. The geographic scope of the study would also include the A358 from its junction with the A303 at Ilminster to its junction with the M5. The Blackdown Hills are designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and as such we do not propose to consider large-scale road building in that area.



The modal scope of the study will be predominantly road-based and would need to understand the details of performance and current investment proposals for the identified parts of the strategic road network, as well as the local authority road network, particularly the A358.

Questions to be addressed

There are a number of questions that need to be addressed as part of the study work, and these are set out below.

- Given the assessment of current and future performance of the A303 corridor are there specific priority location/problems that should be addressed?
- Are there viable potential solutions to these problems which are deliverable, affordable and offer value for money?
- What are the potential timescales for the delivery of the identified potential solutions?
- Are there additional benefits or impacts from combinations of potential solutions over and above those for individual solutions?
- Is there evidence of the impact of investment in potential solutions on the resilience of the road network?
- What are the impacts of investment in the A303 corridor on other road transport links/corridors to the South West?
- Have the potential solutions identified fully considered and optimised the environmental opportunities and mitigation that the potential transport investment could bring?
- Are there any changes necessary to current responsibilities for the management and operation of the road network in the A303 corridor?
- Is further work/analysis required for Government to be able to make specific investment decisions, and if so what are the timescale of such work?

Phases of work

The study will be completed in several stages which are set out below.

- Stage 0: Agreement to the scope, timing and management arrangements for the study
- Stage 1: Review of evidence and identification of problems along the corridor
- Stage 2: Work to finalise the range of infrastructure proposals that could address the problems along the corridor
- Stage 3: Work to assess the affordability, value for money and deliverability of prioritised infrastructure proposals

Governance Arrangements

A303/A30/A358 Reference Group

Given the wide range of stakeholder interest in the A303/A30/A358 study it is proposed to establish a Reference Group for the study. The main role of the Reference Group will be to ensure stakeholders' views are captured and considered during the study process, particularly at key points in the study work and at times of the development of key outputs.