
North Thanet Link – Scheme Update

To: **Thanet Joint Transportation Board, 21 March 2024**

Main Portfolio Area: **KCC – Growth, Environment and Transport**

By: **Director of Highways and Transportation**

Classification: **Unrestricted**

Ward: **Birchington South, Thanet Villages, Westgate-On-Sea, Garlinge,
Salmestone**

Division: **Birchington & Rural, Margate**

Summary: **The report provides an update on the North Thanet Link scheme.**

For information

1. Introduction

- 1.1. The A28 Canterbury Road is an existing primary highway link which routes between St Nicholas-at-Wade and Margate via Birchington and Westgate on Sea. It includes sections of both dual carriageway and single carriageway. Some parts of the route are narrow in nature and do not include dedicated cycling infrastructure.
- 1.2. Users of the A28 have long experienced high volumes of traffic and unreliable journey times, which often results in 'rat running' of vehicles through local villages and residential streets. The issues on the A28 are compounded during times of routine maintenance and unplanned incidents and this further reduces available road capacity. Despite the recent introduction of signage and traffic calming improvements, Acol village also remains a well-used rat run route by traffic avoiding the A28 corridor, this is particularly noticeable during network peaks.
- 1.3. Seasonal fluctuations in traffic flow are experienced on the A28, with summer months typically being busier with unpredictable traffic volumes throughout the day. These instances are often experienced during times of fine weather and local events taking place within the district.
- 1.4. The scope for targeted highway improvements on the A28 corridor itself is very limited and the lack of dedicated cycling facilities, has a bearing on travel mode choice for existing and future residents.
- 1.5. As part of the development of the adopted Thanet Local Plan, the Thanet Transport Strategy (TTS) was produced jointly by Kent County Council and Thanet District Council. This strategy document sets out several key transport interventions to assist in managing demand growth on the local highway network across the current Local Plan period. The draft TTS was reported to JTB in December 2018 and is a key supporting strategy document for the district.
- 1.6. The primary mitigation feature within the TTS is known as the Inner Circuit Route Improvement Strategy (ICRIS). This includes a package of new and improved highway links to support the

existing Primary Road Network. North Thanet Link is a highway improvement scheme which focusses delivery of several ICRIS improvements located within the north of the district.

1.7. A bid has been submitted to the Department for Transport (DfT) for funding from the Major Road Network (MRN) programme to support the delivery of North Thanet Link, and this process is currently ongoing, with several key stages having been completed to date.

1.8. This report provides an overview of North Thanet Link and an update on the past and future workstreams.

2. Background & scheme update

2.1. North Thanet Link (from this point onward referred to as ‘the scheme’) focusses on improving transport connectivity and resilience within Thanet. This will help the local road network to cope with future increases in traffic. It will also provide additional travel routes for pedestrians, cyclists, and public transport services to encourage active travel for short to medium distance journeys. It will help to link existing and future communities together by a range of travel modes.

2.2. The scheme is located to the south of the existing A28 mainly along the Manston and Shottendane Road corridors. It comprises of approximately 9.2km of new and improved highway infrastructure including: -

- widening of existing public highway to local distributor (main road) standards
- construction of new highway links through proposed development sites and on existing farmland
- highway junction improvements
- provision of new walking and cycling routes
- sustainable drainage solutions (i.e draining surface water into the ground avoiding the need to rely on the combined sewer system).



Figure 1 – The location and extent of the scheme.

- 2.3. Current stage preliminary scheme plans can be found in **Appendix A**. These show the intended route and design of the scheme. The scheme will be subject to further design evolution as detailed ground and environmental surveys are completed, which will help to further shape the proposals. The current scheme revisions reflect recent discussions that have been held with key consultees and to respond to some of the feedback received through the public consultation process in Summer 2023.
- 2.4. The scheme provides an alternative southern transport corridor to the existing A28 within Birchington, Westgate-on-Sea and Margate. It will also provide a much-requested eastern bypass around the village of Acol to Columbus Avenue, helping to manage traffic flows through the village and better connect Manston Business Park to existing/planned settlements in North Thanet. It also helps to provide access resilience to key local destinations including the Manston Airport site.
- 2.5. The existing A28 Canterbury Road corridor forms part of the nationally recognised Major Road Network, a specific category of road which enables the KCC to bid for capital funding from DfT via the Major Road Network and Large Local Majors Programme. This fund stream is specifically ringfenced for this type of highway project.
- 2.6. The emerging scheme proposals have been developed into a preliminary design and an initial land referencing exercise has been completed to identify potential land acquisition requirements. Following this process, early-stage discussions have commenced with several land stakeholders and this process will continue as the scheme develops from its preliminary design status, moving toward a planning application and subsequent detailed design process.
- 2.7. While steps are being taken to seek assembly of all the land by voluntary agreement, the formal completion of the legal aspects are often lengthy, and the County Council has no control over this timetable or certainty of completion. Therefore a Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO) will also need to be progressed in parallel to any voluntary negotiations.
- 2.8. The scheme has a strong level of local support. Letters of support have previously been received from the Local Member of Parliament, Birchington, Minster, Acol Parish Councils, Westgate-on-Sea Town Council and Thanet District Council.
- 2.9. A public consultation for the scheme was undertaken between 11 May and 14 June 2023. This process included two well attended public exhibitions events, held in Birchington and Westgate-on-sea, as well as several other promotional activities including press releases, postcard distribution, targeted social media and active Parish Council communications with local residents. A copy of the Consultation Report can be found in **Appendix B**.
- 2.10. The consultation generated 307 responses. These have been analysed and fed into the Consultation Report. Within the consultation questionnaire, stakeholders were asked to what extent they agree or disagree with the overall proposals for the North Thanet Link. 65% of respondents agreed with the proposals, 29% disagreed and 6% neither agreed nor disagreed. This further demonstrates a high level of support for the scheme.
- 2.11. The main reasons for stakeholders supporting the scheme relate to the presence of traffic congestion in the area and the need for better road infrastructure to help manage this.
- 2.12. The main reasons for stakeholders opposing the scheme concerned the impact of the scheme on farmland and a perception that the scheme would increase traffic congestion in the area.

There is also concern with the level of development planned within the district and the perception that the scheme will help to facilitate these coming forward.

- 2.13. Two options for the proposed junction onto the A28 within Birchington (located at the western extent of the scheme) were included within the consultation. 21% of consultees agreed with the signalised junction option and 56% agreed with the roundabout option. The council intends to progress through to the next stage of scheme development.
- 2.14. Following the recent public consultation and extended discussion with other stakeholders, the emerging design of the scheme has been subject to several recent changes. These include: -
- Additional controlled crossing facilities at several locations within the route to cater for pedestrian, cyclist, and equestrian desire lines.
 - Additional footway/cycleway on Shottendane Road to the south of the proposed corridor.
 - Provision of a revised roundabout design for the A28 junction including pedestrian and cycle crossing facilities.
 - Realignment of the Columbus Avenue link (to Manston Road) to reflect emerging development proposals and to lessen the impact on operational farmland.
 - Changes to road alignment and geometry at the eastern extent of the scheme to reflect latest development proposals.
 - Widening of approach lanes at some junctions, increasing capacity to reflect traffic flow forecasts.
 - Reduction in the number of approach arms at the proposed junction with Manston Road/Shottendane Road and Columbus Avenue extension.
 - Relocation of shared footway/cycleway to the north side of Manston Road next to the boundary of Quex Park.
- 2.15. The scheme routes through or near proposed allocated development sites, within the Thanet Local Plan. Therefore the final design of the scheme may be influenced by development planning decisions that are made outside of the direct jurisdiction of the County Council.

3. Scheme programme and future workstreams

- 3.1. Subject to necessary approvals and funding availability, the scheme is estimated to be open to traffic in 2028. The currently anticipated delivery programme is shown in **Table 1** below.

Table 1 – Key Dates

Pre-Strategic Outline Business Case – Approved	Summer 2019
Strategic Outline Business Case (SOBC) - Approved	Winter 2021
Public Consultation – Completed	May/June 2023
Outline Business Case (OBC) – Completed	November 2023
Full Business Case (FBC)	September 2026*
Planning Application	Q4 2024*
Statutory Orders Published	Q2 2025*
Procurement Process (inc initial market engagement)	Q4 2025 to Q3 2026*

*Please note that the above dates are subject to change and may be influenced by approvals, funding availability and potential CPO requirements

- 3.2. Due to the nature and scale of the scheme, planning consent will be required before it can be progressed to construction, and this will be supported by an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA). The submission package and development of the EIA is currently in progress and will continue throughout this year.
- 3.3. The findings and recommendations of the EIA and the subsequent planning process may have a bearing on future scheme design. The planning process will be subject to a statutory public consultation, at which stage local stakeholders will have the opportunity to comment on the final scheme design and proposals.
- 3.4. As part of the proposed planning submission package, an updated transport impact appraisal will be undertaken, which will examine in detail the impact of the scheme on the surrounding highway network. Once this process has been completed, complimentary mitigation measures may be identified and subsequently form part of the scheme proposals. This could include measures such as new/additional waiting restrictions, localised junction improvements and enhanced pedestrian and cycling infrastructure
- 3.5. The scheme is currently considered to offer high value for money for the wider public purse, with the findings of the Business Case currently being subject to audit and review by the DfT. Following statutory approvals (including planning consent being granted) and funding award, the scheme will be subject to a procurement exercise. Initial engagement with the market is already at an early stage and the preferred route of procurement and form of contract will be progressed in full cooperation of the council's Strategic Commissioning Team.
- 3.6. Further stakeholder engagement will be undertaken on the lead up to and during the delivery of the scheme.

4. Financial implications

- 4.1. The scheme is subject to an active bid by KCC to the DfT through its Major Road Network and Large Local Majors funding programme. In December 2021, KCC was awarded £0.75m by the DfT to develop an Outline Business Case (OBC). Consequently an OBC submission was made in November 2023. Ongoing communication between the project team and DfT is underway as part of the assessment and appraisal process. OBC is generally the most

time-consuming stage of the bidding process and involves a large amount of scheme development, stakeholder consultation and economic appraisal work.

- 4.2. The scheme is estimated to cost £76.7m. Subject to successful progression through the MRN funding bid process, the current scheme estimate will be fully externally funded and delivered through a combination of DfT grant funding (£62.9m) and S106 developer contributions (£13.8m). The exact financial figures may be subject to indexation at the point of funding award, however, the scheme would remain fully externally funded.
- 4.3. In the event that MRN funding bid is unsuccessful, the scheme will revert back to a fully developer funded model, with sections of the route being delivered by developers under Section 278/38 Highway Agreements and sections between proposed development sites being designed and delivered by KCC using Section 106 funding. This funding route would also be fully externally funded, however is likely to be delivered over a longer timescale in line with housing delivery. Therefore MRN is the currently preferred funding and delivery route.
- 4.4. DfT recently announced a £36 billion plan to improve transport infrastructure that people use every day. This initiative is known as 'Network North'. As part of this policy paper it was announced that there would be an increase in available funding for MRN schemes, with DfT potential increasing funding to 100% of scheme costs calculated at OBC stage. Whilst at time of writing the full details of this funding package have yet to be shared with the council, this marks a potential commitment from DfT to accelerate MRN scheme delivery.

5. Legal implications

- 5.1. There are no immediate legal implications for the scheme. Legal advice is being sought as required, and due process will be followed in relation to any statutory approvals such as traffic orders and any Compulsory Purchase process.

6. Next steps

- 6.1. Further ground and environmental survey works will take place in Spring/Summer 2024, the findings from these which will inform scheme design evolution and a Planning Application is expected to be submitted in late 2024 / early 2025. This will be subject to its own statutory consultation process.
- 6.2. Discussions with DfT in relation to the OBC will continue with an expected decision on the OBC within the next 3-6 months.
- 6.3. Early-stage land acquisition discussions will continue into next year when a CPO process is likely to be commenced in order to secure scheme programme (subject to planning consent being granted).
- 6.4. Following land acquisition and scheme tendering, a Full Business Case (FBC) will be submitted to DfT and a decision will be made on scheme funding by DfT. A FBC is the final part of the process and is normally undertaken after land and scheme tendering has been completed and the scheme is ready for delivery.

7. Recommendations

For information.

8. Background documents

Appendix A – Preliminary Scheme Drawings
Appendix B – Consultation Report

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Appendix A – Preliminary Scheme Drawings

Appendix B – Consultation Report