



Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership

Highways Agency Pinch Point Programme

Funding bid for M40 Junction 9 (Wendlebury Interchange) Improvements

1. Location and importance of potential scheme

M40 Junction 9 is one of the key strategic junctions in the national motorway and trunk road network. As the interchange between the M40 between London and Birmingham and the A34 corridor to the Thames Valley and beyond to the South Coast, it is the crossroads at the heart of England. This is the point at which traffic between the South Coast international gateways and the Midlands meets movements between London and Birmingham.

The junction also provides access to Bicester, one of the fastest growing towns in the country. This is a town of approximately 30,000 people and is home to the internationally renowned “Bicester Village Outlet Centre”, an upmarket shopping destination which attracts in excess of 5.5 million visitors a year.

However Bicester has even greater potential for sustainable economic growth. The ambition to unlock that potential is being driven forward by the private and public sector, working in partnership through the Local Enterprise Partnerships (both the Oxfordshire City-Region Local Enterprise Partnership, and the South East Midlands Local Enterprise Partnership).

Ambitious plans for jobs-led growth in Bicester are dependent upon investment in providing additional capacity at Junction 9. The significance of the scheme has already been recognised by Oxfordshire County Council who has committed £2m towards the cost of its delivery.

Recent investment in infrastructure has unlocked growth opportunities to the south west of Bicester. Investing in ensuring that Junction 9 has the capability to support further growth will bring added momentum to the pace of delivery in Bicester. It will encourage work on the Bicester Business Park to begin on site (planning permission already granted). It will support the Defence Infrastructure Organisations ambitious plans to consolidate UK logistic operations at Bicester and redevelop the surplus land for economic and housing growth (planning permission being sought).

Investing in Junction 9 will directly support the creation of additional new jobs locally whilst at the same time supporting the national economy through the removal of a known bottleneck at the heart of the UK motorway network.



Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership

Economic Context – Oxfordshire and South East Midlands

Oxfordshire is an international economic powerhouse, driving new technology, new markets and ground-breaking developments which support every aspect of UK industry and commerce. The county is at the heart of Britain's economy, with its entrepreneurs providing the inspiration, the knowledge and expertise that drive growth in the digital low carbon economy.

Through the Oxfordshire City-Region Local Enterprise Partnership and South East Midlands Local Enterprise Partnership, the private sector is working with the public sector to provide the strategic leadership for economic growth. Investing in the removal of the pinch point at Junction 9 is identified as a priority by both Partnerships.

Oxfordshire County Council (as the local transport authority) worked closely with the Highways Agency to successfully deliver an earlier improvement to Junction 9. The County Council will look to build upon this relationship to ensure the early delivery of this scheme. Anecdotal evidence from business partners within Bicester Vision (the private sector led business partnership with the public sector locally) confirm the importance of infrastructure for businesses investing in the local economy. Investing in this scheme is an identified priority for Bicester Vision.

Junction 9 is a bottleneck on the transport network that supports the Oxfordshire Growth Arc. The three priority areas for economic growth and housing development in Oxfordshire lie on this Arc: Oxford (14,000 jobs and 9,000 dwellings) at the centre of the City Region complemented by significant growth at Bicester (12,500 jobs and 7,000 dwellings) in the north and Science Vale (16,000 jobs and 13,000 dwellings) to the south.

Delivery of economic growth in these three locations is the key priority for the Oxfordshire City-Region Local Enterprise Partnership. Delivery of economic growth at Bicester is seen by the South East Midlands Local Enterprise Partnership as a key component of the much wider corridor linking Oxfordshire with Buckinghamshire, Milton Keynes and beyond to Bedford.

Development/Economic Context - Bicester

Bicester's strategic location at the heart of England gives it unrivalled locational advantages for economic growth. With its close proximity to economic markets in central England plus its easy access to international gateways, Bicester has a unique offer for private sector investors.

Significant investment channelled through the joint working arrangements established to deliver the eco-town proposal is already beginning to see



Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership

results on the ground. A major redevelopment of the town centre will see facilities provided that befit a town of Bicester's importance. Investment in education has seen educational attainment being turned around, giving prospective employers access to a well-educated and motivated work force. Investment in the eco-town proposal is starting to bear fruit and will encourage growth in sustainable construction technologies. Investment by the Ministry of Defence in its logistics operations brings with it further opportunities to develop new economic sectors within the local economy.

Building on this success the two local authorities – Cherwell District Council and Oxfordshire County Council - have been leading a jointly-commissioned piece of work to develop a longer-term vision for the growth of Bicester. The resulting master-plan will be used to underpin the Local Plan for Bicester, in the process identifying the infrastructure that needs to be delivered in order to facilitate the economic led vision for Bicester.

Removing the bottleneck at Junction 9 is consistently seen by all parties – by public and private sector, resident and visitor alike – as being a critical piece in the infrastructure jigsaw.

2. Description of the problem

Congestion at Junction 9 of the M40 has been a concern for the Highways Agency and Oxfordshire County Council over a number of years, causing significant queues on both the national and local highway networks. The levels of congestion also reduce the resilience of the network to delays as a consequence of incidents on the networks.

The Highways Agency has been working on improvements to the junction for some time. A first phase of improvements was implemented in 2011, with the intention that the Highways Agency would take forward a second phase shortly thereafter. Some of the preparatory work for the second phase of works was completed as part of the earlier scheme. Funding for the second phase of work was lost as part of the cut back in the national programme in response to the economic situation.

Whilst the Phase One improvements have dealt well with current problems, it is clear that the planned growth in Bicester will put the junction under increasing strain in the future and act as a barrier to realising the economic potential of the town. The Highways Agency currently place holding objections on any new economic proposal in Bicester due to its concern as to the potential impact on Junction 9

The potential of Bicester will continue to be curtailed until Junction 9 is resolved. In particular an application to create 3,000 jobs at the Bicester



Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership

Business Park has a condition on it that only allows 50% of the site to be progressed prior to completion of the Junction 9 improvements. The proposals from the Defence Infrastructure Organisation for Bicester are likely to have similar constraints placed upon them.

The overall degree of saturation at the junction with the Phase One scheme in place but no further improvements is assessed as being 140% in the a.m. peak by 2030 with expected growth, and 208% in the p.m. peak. This would result in long traffic queues on the approaches to the junction and road safety issues caused by queuing traffic on the motorway. The majority of movements at the junction currently are between the A34 and the M40 north of the junction, but in addition there will be increasing pressure from the A41 arm.

3. Ideas for a solution

Following on from the first phase of improvements, the agreed Highways Agency scheme for phase two proposes to:

- widen the A34 northbound carriageway approach from 2 lanes to 3 lanes, then to 4 lanes at the roundabout
- introduce traffic signals on the A34 northbound approach
- widen the A41 northbound exit from 2 lanes to 3 lanes
- extend the A41 southbound 3 lane approach flare

A34 northbound approach to the junction – under this arrangement two lanes would be available for M40 northbound traffic. The lay-by nearest the junction would need to be closed for safety reasons. This widening and the traffic signals would provide increased capacity on the approach to the junction and would improve journey time reliability.

A41 northbound exit – would involve widening to three lanes heading away from the junction before merging to two lanes. The lay-by nearest the junction would need to be closed for safety reasons. Providing three lanes here would allow all three lanes on the roundabout to be used for A41 traffic.

A41 southbound approach – the existing two-lane carriageway would be re-marked as three lanes in advance of the junction. The lay-by nearest the junction would need to be closed for safety reasons. Entry to the roundabout would need to continue to be controlled by traffic signals. This would provide increased capacity on the approach to the junction and would allow more traffic to pass through the traffic signals than with just the Phase One improvements in place. As a result journey times through the junction would be reduced.



Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership

On the roundabout – the carriageway would need to be widened to accommodate three lanes on the west of the roundabout between the A34 exit and entry. This would increase the capacity of the roundabout.

This potential solution has been modelled to see how it would perform. The modelling work shows that the implementation of the Phase Two scheme could increase the capacity of the junction enabling 7-10% more traffic to use the junction in the peak periods, compared to the Phase One scheme.

The Local Enterprise Partnerships understand that this scheme will cost in the region of £7-8m to deliver, including finalising the design. Oxfordshire County Council has agreed to provide up to £2m towards the improvement. This reflects both the importance given by the County Council to addressing the issue and the fact that a proportion of the required works fall on its network.

The County Council is keen to discuss with the Highways Agency the potential for it to implement the scheme on behalf of the Agency.

4. Supporting the Oxfordshire Science Vale Enterprise Zone

The Enterprise Zone for the Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership is within the Science Vale UK (SVUK) growth area.

In order for this Enterprise Zone to maximise its potential, access to it will need to be improved. Strategic movements into and out of Science Vale already use the A34 as an access corridor. Removing the bottleneck at Junction 9 will support delivery of the growth proposed in the Enterprise Zone by improving resilience of the network.

The Enterprise Zone will make a significant contribution to growth in the Oxfordshire area and it will also:

- help to build the areas status as an international centre of excellence in science and technology;
- attract international businesses to the area through a compelling package of initiatives and incentives; and
- build on the success and make the UK as a whole more competitive by creating jobs in the private sector in an area where there is a real prospect for growth

The SVUK area has growth targets of over 16,000 jobs over the next 15 years, and the Enterprise Zone will deliver up to 8,400 of those direct jobs by 2015.



Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership

The Enterprise Zone covers 92 hectares and creating 200,000 sq. m of new employment space at the Harwell and Milton Park Business Parks.

5. Supporting other priority development

The delivery of improvements at M40 Junction 9 will enable the junction to increase its capacity thereby playing a key role in facilitating jobs-led economic growth. It will also increase the resilience of the network both for national and local traffic.

There are three developments that are seen by central Government as national priorities: the consolidation of military logistics operations in Bicester, the development of surplus Ministry of Defence land at Graven Hill; and the eco-town proposal to the north-west of Bicester.

Graven Hill: the Ministry of Defence (MoD) have declared the majority of their site here as surplus Government Land. The MoD also needs to reduce its estate and to consolidate its logistic operations, particularly so that it is in a position to respond effectively at a time of surge.

The MoD plans to sell off the surplus land at Graven Hill for re-development. This will enable Graven Hill to be redeveloped and deliver over 2,000 jobs and 1,900 homes on the site. In turn, the sale of this land will enable the MoD to deliver the National Defence Logistics Hub for the UK Armed Forces, just outside Bicester.

Access to these sites from the strategic road network is of paramount importance and therefore the improvement to M40 Junction 9 will enable these developments to maximise their potential and play a key role in the economic growth of Bicester.

North West Bicester: this development has the potential to deliver 5,000 houses in Bicester and a similar number of jobs. A priority for Departments across Government, delivery of the longer-term ambition for this development will be dependent upon improved access via Junction 9.

6. Supporting job creation

The key driver behind this bid is the commitment by the Oxfordshire City-Region Local Enterprise Partnership and the South East Midlands Local Enterprise Partnership to contribute towards the creation of the necessary conditions for economic growth and job creation.



Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership

The Bicester master-planning work has identified that there is the potential to create just over 15,000 jobs in the town over the next 20 to 25 years. Removing the bottleneck at Junction 9 will immediately support the delivery of the Bicester Business Park. However, the creation of the 3,000 jobs already approved for this site are constrained by a planning condition that only allows 50% of the site to be progressed prior to completion of the Junction 9 improvements.

With the level of growth proposed for Bicester, the need to improve Junction 9 so that other similar conditions are not placed on applications is of paramount importance to the development of the town.

In addition to Bicester's growth, there is the potential for significant economic growth in both Oxford and the Science Vale UK area to the south of the county. The number of jobs planned over the next 20 to 25 years along the Oxfordshire Growth Arc is:

Oxford	14,000
Bicester	15,000
Science Vale	12,000

7. Supporting housing growth

Cherwell District Council through their emerging Local Plan aims to deliver 16,750 new homes across the district to 2031. Nearly 7,000 of these will be built in Bicester, almost doubling the size of the town over the next 25 years.

Although, Bicester's growth needs to be jobs-led supported by housing growth investment into key pieces of infrastructure, such as improvements at M40 Junction 9, will ensure that these developments are able to meet the needs of the local community and economy.

A considerable amount of housing growth is planned across Oxfordshire up to 2031:

Oxford	9,000
Bicester	7,000
Science Vale UK	13,000
West Oxfordshire	4,300 +

8. Deliverable solution

Based on the work previously undertaken with the Highways Agency, the Oxfordshire City-Region Local Enterprise Partnership understands that this



Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership

scheme could complete its detailed design stage and be delivered within 12 months of the funding being approved. Therefore, this scheme could clearly be implemented within the timeframe of the Pinch Point Programme.

It is also the Partnership's understanding that the proposed solution is all within the existing highway boundary and therefore no land would need to be purchased to deliver this improvement.

9. Other stakeholders need consultation

Full public and stakeholder was undertaken in 2010 for the first phase of improvements. As part of this consultation, reference was made to the phase two improvements.

Further more detailed consultation could be required but this would be a decision for the project team once this bid had been approved.

Accompanying this bid are letters of support from key stakeholders which demonstrate how important this improvement is to the local economy and business sector, in particular.