

Meeting note

Project name	Oxfordshire Strategic Rail Freight Interchange
File reference	TR050008
Status	Final
Author	The Planning Inspectorate
Date	16 February 2021
Meeting with	Oxfordshire Rail freight Ltd
Venue	Microsoft Teams
Meeting objectives	Project Inception Meeting
Circulation	All attendees

Summary of key points discussed and advice given

The Planning Inspectorate (the Inspectorate) advised that a note of the meeting would be taken and published on its website in accordance with section 51 of the Planning Act 2008 (the PA2008). Any advice given under section 51 would not constitute legal advice upon which applicants (or others) could rely.

The Inspectorate explained that the publication of the meeting note could be delayed up to six months, or until a formal scoping request had been submitted (if requested by an Applicant for commercial reasons).

Project Outline

The Applicant explained that a Strategic Rail Freight Interchange (SRFI) is a large rail freight interchange and distribution centre linked into both the rail and trunk road systems. It has rail served warehousing and container handling facilities, enabling freight to be transferred between transport modes (i.e. from lorry to train).

The Applicant stated that currently SRFI's are concentrated in the Midlands, principally along the M1-M6 corridor with no SRFI's along the M40 corridor. The Applicant stated that the chosen location would be capable of expanding the existing network of SRFI's, meet the needs of existing and future businesses in Oxfordshire and be capable of assisting the needs of London and the Midlands. The location is adjacent to the M40 motorway and has a direct link to the Chiltern Line which already forms part of the Strategic Rail Freight Network.

Regarding access to the site the Applicant believes the best option would be to include improvement of junction 10 of the M40 as well as a new link road to connect the SRFI to junction 10 which would divert the B430 around Ardley. The Applicant advised it is also considering a further relief road for the village of Middleton Stoney would reduce congestion and improve amenity within the village by taking traffic out of the village.

Stakeholder Engagement

The Applicant had established a transport working group which to date has met on three occasions and includes Highways England and Oxfordshire County Council (CC). Engagement had also taken place with senior officials and members of Oxfordshire CC

and Local Planning Authorities to discuss the proposed ideas. The Applicant explained that the discussions focused upon the transport provision and options available.

The Applicant advised it is also in discussions with Network Rail and will continue to engage with them. They are also in discussion with other parties such as the Dorchester group who are developing Heyford Park.

EIA process

The Applicant stated that it wished to begin scoping within the next four to six weeks. The Inspectorate advised that the shape file should be submitted with a minimum of 10 working days in advance of the scoping submission.

The Inspectorate advised that the larger the number of project options that are presented within the scoping report, the less informative the responses might be. The Applicant advised that the only variable options that are proposed are around the alignment of the relief road around Middleton Stoney. The Inspectorate informed the Applicant changes to project designs post-scoping are common given the point in time in project lifecycle at which EIA scoping is typically undertaken. Whilst re-scoping at a later date in light of any such changes is an option, this is for the applicant to consider in respect of whether this is likely to add value to their assessment process, depending upon the nature and scale of the design changes that may have occurred post-scoping. The Inspectorate advised that the EIA Regulations do not allow for "targeted" re-scoping of particular project aspects. Any request for revised / updated scoping opinion would be considered in its own right as a new request for the project as a whole, and any adopted scoping opinion would supersede any previous opinion relating to that project.

The Inspectorate advised that a scoping opinion must be adopted within 42 days of receipt of a valid request containing the information as set out in EIA Regulation 10. Within this period 28 days must be given to consultation bodies meaning although an opinion could be adopted earlier than the 42 day deadline, this is dependant on circumstances and the Inspectorate does not commit to or guarantee the adoption of scoping opinions any earlier than is required by the regulations. Any late responses received from consultation bodies to the Inspectorate will still be published as late submissions.

NSIPs and Associated Development

The Applicant stated that in addition to the application for the SRFI NSIP there are currently two possible highway NSIP's. The Applicant confirmed that the application will be similar to that for the approved East Midlands Gateway DCO. The first highway NSIP will be for alterations to the motorway and the second relates to a trunk road exceeding 50mph. The Applicant confirmed that the number of NSIP's would be clear in the application. The Applicant confirmed that the By-pass around Ardley would be Associated Development under the DCO.

Currently on the proposed site is a green and food waste composting centre which is operated by Severn Trent Green Power and services a contract for Oxfordshire CC. The Applicant explained that this facility currently undertakes a natural process to produce compost which is taken away from the site. The Applicant stated its current intention is to relocate that operation to an alternative site as part of the development applied for in the DCO although in the view the composting operation is not part of the NSIP to be

applied for and welcomed the Inspectorate's views on whether or not such provision can be included within the DCO as Associated Development. The Inspectorate suggested the Applicant formulate an assessment of their views on why it forms associated development and the Inspectorate will review and provide comments where possible. However, the Inspectorate advised the Applicant that any comments made will not constitute legal advice upon which the Applicant could rely and was advised to consider seeking its own legal advice on whether its intended provision should be included as associated development.

Compulsory acquisition

The Applicant advised that the majority of the main site for development is under option but while the highway arrangements are still being settled none of the interests have yet been identified. The Applicant indicated however that they anticipate some levels of compulsory acquisition being required.

Consultation

The Inspectorate advised that there had been few projects which had undertaken consultation since the new regulations¹ came into force. The Inspectorate highlighted that the engagement approach taken should be to ensure that everybody is able to access the documents required. The new regulations do now mean that documents are not required to be made available in deposit locations however the Applicant is expected to take reasonable steps to ensure that anyone wishing to view the documentation can find these documents online with hard copies being made available by the Applicant on request. The Inspectorate advised the Applicant to consider a variety of consultation methods, to help enable participation, especially if any lockdown restrictions remain. Some developers have chosen to use radio announcements, or virtual mobile libraries, for example. As projects develop the Inspectorate will be better placed to advise on best practices for virtual / digital consultations.

The Project Programme

The Applicant advised that the programme they currently have is widely influenced by the work of Highways England regarding the modelling of the improvement to junction 10 of the M40.

The Applicant anticipates that the first round of consultation is expected to take place in Summer 2021. This will be non- statutory consultation but treated and undertaken as a comprehensive consultation (akin to statutory). Formal statutory consultation would then be anticipated to take place Q1 2022 with submission in the same year.

Specific decisions/ follow-up required?

The following actions were agreed:

- The Applicant to send an overview of the waste Recycling centre and why they believe it is associated development.
- The Inspectorate to send the Applicant a form to create the Project Page.
- The Applicant to contact the Inspectorate to arrange a meeting following the scoping opinion.

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/guidance-on-procedural-requirements-for-major-infrastructure-projects>