

Scrutiny Committee



Report of Head of Policy and Programmes

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To: SCRUTINY

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A34 diversion routing

Purpose of Report

1. This paper has been prepared following presentation of this topic (A34 Diversions) at Vale Scrutiny Committee held on 25th November 2021. At this meeting National Highways and Oxfordshire County Council were requested to provide further information so that it could return to Scrutiny in the future.
2. In summary, the Council made the following requests for further information is provided below:
 - a. Risk assessment of diversions, including details of factors and issues considered
 - b. Appraisal of various options – Diversions and others
 - i. With cost benefit analysis with justification
 - ii. Evidence to show that this has happened
 - c. Schedule of road closures over time – dates, times, purpose (particularly for the past 5 years)
 - i. Specifically in order to identify what may have changed in the past 3 years
 - d. When complete, a copy of review work undergone for A34 diversions, which was indicated would be undertaken in 1-3 years
 - e. Consideration of contraflow
 - f. Earlier versions of diversion documents and any supporting documents
 - i. Which identify dates of when they were in place
 - g. When did night-time working start?
 - h. Strategies in place to minimise disruption

3. Vale Officers and County colleagues have sought clarification and further information on these requests from National Highways via email and during meetings on a number of occasions following the scrutiny committee. Some detail has been provided by National Highways, which is set out in the “Findings” section of this Paper.
4. Vale and County Officers met with two A34 Route Managers in a meeting held by National Highways on 7 July 2022 which was later rescheduled to 12 July 2022, due to non-attendances within the National Highways team.
5. The rescheduled meeting included employees from National Highways in network planning and the diversions teams. District and County officers sought to gain more insight into the items of information requested during the scrutiny committee meeting.
6. Summary of Meeting discussions:
 - a. National Highways employees indicated that diversion routeing is decided on a case by case basis. Thus the diversion routes included in the Background Papers attached to this Paper are for emergency closures, as opposed to planned closures. Vale Officers requested that the risk assessment and routes for example closures be shared with us.
 - b. National Highways employees indicated that are happy to discuss alternative route options for the diversions.
 - c. In terms of gaining a schedule of historical closures, National Highways indicated that this information was not readily available or easily accessible by National Highways employees, with all works along the entirety of the A34 grouped in one place. This highlights shortcomings of the National Highways system in reviewing impacts of individual sections of the network, including to review of regularity of diversions in specific locations and subsequent impact on local communities.

- d. National Highways employees indicated that there was no schedule for review of the A34 diversions in the vicinity of Wantage. Vale Officers highlighted that justification for review of the routes in the Wantage area is generated by the identified impact on local communities inherently highlighted here.
- e. National Highways employees indicated that further details could be sourced from other colleagues within the National Highways team within the “Service Delivery” team, who were not present during the meeting. National Highways employees will be contacting these individuals and will arrange a further meeting for County and Vale Officers to discuss these requests for information further. National Highway indicated that one month was needed to arrange this meeting.

Corporate Objectives

- 7. Engagement with Oxfordshire County Council and National Highways supports the Corporate Plan 2020-2024 theme ‘Working in Partnership’.

Background

- 8. In 2019 the A34 was subject to a series of night closures due to a construction project on the A34 at that time. These closures, which often operated between 10pm and 6am, re-routed traffic on to the A338 and the A417.
- 9. There are three separate re-routing arrangements for the A34. The northern most extends between Botley Interchange and Milton, there is a short diversion extending between Chilton and Milton Interchange, and finally a southern diversion between Chilton and Beedon. The former and latter both pass through Wantage, resulting in a heightened exposure to re-routed traffic.
- 10. Further background information can also be found in the previous Scrutiny Paper and Committee Meeting Notes on this matter, as listed in the Background Papers.

Findings

11. Responses received from National Highways thus far have addressed or partly addressed the below requests:

- e. Consideration of contraflow
- h. Strategies in place to minimise disruption

Contraflow Measures

12. Highways England employees have confirmed that introduction of contraflow as a management strategy to avoid use of diversions would require significant time and cost to implement and National Highways do not consider it to be an appropriate measure to undertake maintenance and short term works for a highway. Their reasoning is set out below.

13. Initially, implementing contraflow as a strategy to manage vehicular traffic requires significant ground and central reservation works to safely allow vehicles to cross over onto the other side of the carriageway. The central reservation for many major roads, including the A34, is designed with reinforced barriers to deflect vehicles from encroaching into the opposing flow of traffic in the event of a collision. Accordingly, the surface materials are not designed or maintained in a way for vehicles to easily pass across them. The materials used are designed to support a central barrier, which is concreted into the central reservation surface, and is dissimilar to the material used for the driving lanes.

14. In strategic locations removable central reservation posts (socketed posts with a temporary terminal) can be installed to support the provision of contraflow, this initially requires road surface changes and central barrier work, as described above. It is estimated that the works to initially implement a contraflow would cost in the region of £200,000. Following this, further highway preparation before and after the closure is required to ensure drivers understand the road layout changes during the contraflow.

15. To set up a contraflow, to ensure drivers do not enter the pre-determined work area, a range of measures are used to ensure highway safety for both drivers and works teams. These measures typically take 2-3 nights of work to implement. This is typically undertaken at night time, which is deemed to be the least disruptive time as it will impact fewer vehicles per hour. The measures required to implement a contraflow include: installation of relevant signage informing drivers how the road layout has changed, introduction and removal of reflective / painted lines on the ground to ensure drivers do not follow the existing lane markings, installation of lighting to ensure clear visibility of signage as well as the new barriers introduced for the contraflow, and finally removal of the existing central barrier and installation of a temporary protective barrier in a manner that will ensure highway safety is maintained at all times. This process would then be repeated in the reverse order to remove these measures once the works are complete.
16. National Highways introduced overnight closures for highway maintenance and works in order to reduce the number of vehicles impacted by road closures, and thus reduce the number of vehicles which would travel along the diversion routes during the day. Implementing a contraflow would reduce capacity on the road network during higher demands during the daytime and encourage drivers to divert onto minor roads during peak times.
17. As set out above, the range of works required to initially implement a contraflow, as well as operate an established contraflow arrangement, are practical for works that require road closures which extend over multiple days and nights, owing to the 4-6 night preparation and removal requirements.
18. Therefore, the type of highway maintenance and work typically requiring use of overnight diversions would not warrant the implementation of a multi-day contraflow.

Strategies to minimise disruption

19. National Highways have explained that when scheduling diversion routes, National Highways and Oxfordshire County Council seek to avoid public holidays or clashes with other major organised events. County Council have a road space booking team who coordinate works to ensure no scheduled local highway works conflict with diversion routes, when in operation, and ensure highway users have an alternative route to their destination, when required.

Retained requests for information

20. Requests still requiring additional response / information from National Highways are as follows:
 - a. Risk assessment of diversions, including details of factors and issues considered
 - b. Appraisal of various options – Diversions and others
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 - c. Schedule of road closures over time – dates, times, purpose (particularly for the past 5 years)
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 - d. When complete, a copy of review work undergone for A34 diversions, which was indicated would be undertaken in 1-3 years
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Other Considerations

21. It is pertinent to highlight progress with planning applications at Crab Hill, Wantage. Outline planning permission (P13/V1764/O) was granted for 1500 homes, employment floor space, neighbourhood centre / community hub facilities, a primary school, park and recreational facilities, and road access connecting to A417 and A338 which was approved in 2015.

22. Since this time a range of full planning applications have come forward which have amounted to support for the delivery of the associated link road. The road for Crab Hill follows the intended safeguarded road route identified in the Vale Local Plan Part 1, known as Wantage Eastern Link Road (Appendix E, ref E9).
23. Both access junctions for the link road are under construction currently (for the A417 and A338), while the connecting road section between the two junctions is now fully funded, therefore the link road is in the process of being delivered. Once constructed this road may allow diverted traffic following the Milton and Botley Interchange diversion route to avoid the centre of Wantage, where a number of the properties affected by the diversions are located.

Conclusion

24. There are a number of requests for further information which have not been addressed by National Highways.
25. Officers present will note down any suggestions made and potentially put these forward as a formal scrutiny recommendation to Cllr Emily Smith to liaise with the County Council.

Background Papers

26. Maps showing A34 diversion routes:
 - Map 4 – Area 3 A34 Diversions Milton Interchange and Botley Interchange (A417 and A338)
 - Map 5 – Area 3 A34 Diversions Chilton and Milton Interchange
 - Map 6 – Area 3 A34 Diversions Bi-Directional Beedon and Chilton
 - Vale Scrutiny Committee Paper, 17 November 2021
 - Vale Scrutiny Committee Minutes, 25 November 2021