## Review

What the impact of Ipswich closing the Orwell Bridge has on Ipswich and how the number of closures can be minimised.

## Review Brief

When the Orwell Bridge is closed for any reason, planned or unplanned, traffic that would otherwise remain on the A14 is diverted through urban Ipswich. Depending on the timing the impact to the town can be minimal or considerable. Weekday closures affect journeys to and from work and school and the general movement of traffic that is necessary for a 21st century town to function. For many residents it means having more vehicles, including lorries, passing their homes than is normally the case, often at night.

## Aims/ Objectives of Review

To obtain a clear understanding of the circumstances that lead to the closure of the Orwell Bridge and the impact this has on Ipswich and to gain evidence that everything possible is done to avoid closing the bridge.

## Councillors

- George Debman
- Chris Stewart (until March 2016)
- Andrew Cann (until May 2016)
- Sandra Gage
- Oliver Holmes

## Officers

- Russell Williams
- Michael Newsham

## Timescale

Update to Strategic Overview & Scrutiny Committee 13 November 2014.

### Meeting 27 October 2014

**Attendees:**

- Councillor C Stewart
- Councillor G Debman
- Councillor P Smart (Portfolio Holder Environment & Transport)
- Russell Williams (Chief Executive)
- Michael Newsham (Integrated Transport Officer)
- Stephen Britt (Chair of Transport & Infrastructure Suffolk Chamber of Commerce)
- Richard Morphew (Hawk Express Taxi Ltd)
- Bob Hall (J Kemball Haulage Company)
- John Hunt (Ipswich Taxi Drivers Association)
- Dean Robbie (Ipswich Buses)
- Jess Dool (Democratic Services)
1.1. Councillor Debman welcomed everyone and advised that the meeting had been called to discuss the impact on Ipswich when the Orwell Bridge closed and specifically with regards to the impact on those present.

1.2. It was confirmed that the meeting had been arranged to agree what questions could be asked to both Suffolk Constabulary and that the Highways Agency to gather more information with regards to the issues caused by closures and what could be done to improve the situation.

1.3. Mr Newsham, Integrated Transport Officer at IBC, advised that prior to the meeting a discussion had taken place with Mr Nigel Allsopp, the Emergency Planning Manager (East) of the Highways Agency to discuss the questions that had been originally asked in the proposal.

1.4. Discussion took place around the communication of information, the UTMC system, permanent signage and the banning of HGV vehicles in extenuating circumstances.

1.5. It was agreed that an invite be sent to Suffolk County Council, the Highways Agency (to provide a briefing note) and also the Police & Crime Commissioner be requested to attend a future Strategic Overview & Scrutiny Committee meeting. Prior to any such meeting being held, the Task and Finish Group to meet to discuss and agree the questions to be asked. An update would also be provided to the Strategic Overview & Scrutiny Committee at the meeting on the 18 December 2014.

Actions:-

- Mr Newsham to request Mr Allsopp to provide a briefing and attend a future Strategic Overview & Scrutiny Committee meeting with representatives from SCC, Suffolk Constabulary and the P&CC.
- The T&F Group to meet prior to the Strategic Overview & Scrutiny Committee meeting to agree questions to be asked.
- An update to be provided at the 18 December 2014 Overview & Scrutiny Committee meeting.

Meeting 24th November 2014

Attendees:

Councillor C Stewart
Councillor G Debman
Michael Newsham (Integrated Transport Officer)
Bob Hall (J Kemball Haulage Company)
Dean Robbie (Ipswich Buses)

Jan Robinson (Democratic Services)
1.1 The Task and Finish Group discussed questions for the Strategic Overview and Scrutiny Committee in January 2015 when representatives from the Highways Agency, County Council and the P & CC would be requested to attend.

1.2 After discussion the Task and Finish Group agreed the following questions:

- Councillor C Stewart to formulate a question relating to traffic flow rates through the town and the maximum capacity of the roads. (County Council Question)
- Where are the signs located on the A12/A14 for the diversionary routes through the town centre? (Highways Agency question)
- Is the recommended route through the town centre fit for the 21st century?
- Given that there will be quiet periods on the A14 can the Highway Agency explain why they are not considering a variable speed limit rather than a fixed speed limit?
- Would it be possible to prohibit lorries from the outside lane? (Highway Agency question)
- Have the Highways Agency given consideration to the use of the old A12 Copdock and the old A45 road at Norwich Road Claydon as a location to stack HGV’s when the Orwell Bridge was shut to prevent them from travelling on the A14 at this time. (Highway Agency question)
- Why can’t the A14/A12 signs be used more effectively when the bridge is closed? (Highway Agency question)
- Have you considered a blanket ban for HGV’s except for loading and access in the town centre?
- What were the traffic flows coming off at the Seven Hills junction?

Actions:-

- Mr Allsopp, Councillor Newman and the Police & Crime Commissioner to be invited to the Strategic Overview and Scrutiny Committee in January 2015.
- A list of draft questions to be submitted to the Highways Agency and County Council in advance with the proviso that there may be more questions on the night.

Meeting 26 February 2015

Attendees:

Councillor G Debman
Councillor C Stewart
Michael Newsham (Integrated Transport Officer)

Trisha Sutton (Minutes)

1.1 The Integrated Transport Officer drew Members attention to paragraph 56.27 of the minutes of the Strategic Overview & Scrutiny Committee held on 29 January 2015 when it had been agreed that the Task & Finish Group would meet to discuss any recommendations they felt necessary to be reported
back to the Committee.

1.2 It was recognised that some recommendations would be dependent on whether a 50mph speed limit on the Orwell Bridge were to be introduced and that information would not be relevant until any speed limit had been in operation for at least 6 months.

1.3 In response to a request by Councillor Stewart discussion took place about whether any data generated would refer to traffic within a specified area of the diversionary route or within a 10 mile radius of the Town Centre but the traffic flow on any ordinary day should also be included to allow for comparisons to be made.

1.4 It was acknowledged that in respect of a ban being placed on HGVs within the Town Centre (other than for loading and unloading) drivers may not follow this and it would be up to the Police to enforce such a ban.

1.5 In respect of the provision of any alternative stacking areas being provided it would still be up to each HGV driver whether they would prefer to park up or join any traffic queue and they could choose alternative routes if they wished.

1.6 Discussion took place about the cost impact to the local economy of delays when the Orwell Bridge was closed and it had been reported to the Committee at the meeting that although data would be useful to have, to what end could it be used?

1.7 Members agreed that not enough information had been discussed about the Urban Traffic Management Control system (UTMC) and how this would aid traffic flows when it was fully functional in the event of a closure. It was suggested that a presentation to the Strategic Overview & Scrutiny Committee by Suffolk County Council on the UTMC be requested.

Recommendations: That the following be referred to the Strategic Overview & Scrutiny Committee for debate at a future meeting.

1. That, the Chair of the Strategic Overview & Scrutiny Committee write to the visitors for their attendance at the meeting on the 29 January 2015 to thank them for their contribution to the debate.

2. That, Suffolk County Council be asked to consider introducing a Traffic Regulation Order so that motor vehicles over 7.5t (HGVs) would not be allowed in the town centre, except for access and loading.

3. That, the suggestions, made by Councillor Smart at the Strategic Overview & Scrutiny Committee on 29 January 2015, that consideration be given to the provision of a HGV stacking area(s) when the Orwell Bridge was closed and that high sided vehicles not be allowed to use the Orwell Bridge during adverse weather, be referred to the Highways Agency and Suffolk County Council.

4. That, in the event of a 50mph speed limit being introduced on the Orwell Bridge, the Highways Agency be asked to provide information on its effect, six months after it had been implemented.

5. That, Suffolk County Council be asked to give a presentation to the
6. That, the Highways Agency be asked to send the minutes of any future meetings regarding the Orwell Bridge to Ipswich Borough Council or preferably to include an invitation for an IBC representative to attend any such meetings.

7. That, the Strategic Overview & Scrutiny Committee consider whether they wish to broaden the remit of this matter to look more generally at traffic levels in Ipswich and their effect on the town.

Meeting 10 October 2016

Attendees:
Councillor G Debman
Councillor S Gage
Councillor O Holmes
Michael Newsham (Integrated Transport Officer)
Trisha Sutton (Minutes)

1.1 At the Task & Finish Group held on 26 February 2015 it had been recommended that the Highways Agency be asked to provide information on the effect of a speed limit being introduced on the Orwell Bridge, six months after its implementation. The Police & Crime Commissioner had stated that the new signage and road markings had been in place since April 2016 although Mr Newsham highlighted that a 60mph speed restriction had only been enforceable on the Orwell Bridge since July 2016.

1.2 Councillor Debman had requested that, prior to the next Overview & Scrutiny Committee when the update on the speed restriction on the Orwell Bridge was due to be discussed (as part of the agreed Work Programme), that a Task & Finish Group be convened to formulate questions about whether there had been a reduction in accidents for the Norfolk & Suffolk Roads Policing Inspector of Suffolk Constabulary and Highways England to answer.

1.3 Further discussion took place about the suggested provision of a stacking area on the A12 or A14 and the traffic regulation orders for heavy goods vehicles over 7.5t in the Town Centre. It was recognised that bad weather conditions had not yet occurred and it would be beneficial to the Committee to consider statistics on the impact of the bridge speed limit during more adverse weather conditions.

1.4 The following questions were considered to be asked of Highways England:-

- Had there been a difference in the number of accidents from July 2016 to date, compared to last year’s figures?
- Had the reduction in the speed limit had any effect on the number of bridge closures?
- What were the current ‘Operation Stack’ procedures?
- Had the reduction of speed reduced the amount of accidents for vehicles coming out of the petrol garage?
- What effect has the reduction in speed limit made to traffic between the junctions of Wherstead Road to the Nacton Road interchange?
- In the event of bad weather conditions, what actions are in place to ensure smooth traffic flow over the bridge?
- Had the reduction in the speed limit meant that recovery times following a closure had been reduced?
- Had there been an increase in the amount of HGV’s using the A14 and crossing the bridge?

Recommendations:

1. that the questions above be submitted to Highways England and the responses be discussed by the Overview & Scrutiny Committee on 27 October 2016.
2. that, at the Overview & Scrutiny Committee on 2 March 2017, Highways England, the Norfolk & Suffolk Roads Policing Inspector and the representatives who attended the Committee in January 2015, be invited to discuss detailed comparable statistics, (which could include weather condition information) when available.