

A5 M1 Link public inquiry gets the go ahead

22 September 2011

Central Bedfordshire Council has welcomed the announcement from the Department of Transport to restart the public inquiry for the much needed A5 M1 Link bypass.

Residents have been campaigning for a new bypass for many years with traffic currently travelling along the A5 causing daily traffic congestion and large tail backs throughout the area.

The new 2.9 mile dual carriageway will run east from the A5 north of Dunstable to the M1 at a new junction (J11a) and will bring great economic, environmental and sustainable benefits for the whole area, as well as improving journey time reliability and safety for those travelling on the A5 in the southern part of Central Bedfordshire.

Due to the Government's Comprehensive Spending Review earlier this year the public inquiry for this scheme was postponed due to uncertainty over the availability of funding. However, following a contribution from developers Lands Improvement Holdings and Friends Life Company, Roads Minister, Mike Penning MP has now given the go ahead for a local inquiry to start next year.

Cllr Ken Matthews, Executive Member for Strategic Planning and Economic Development for Central Bedfordshire Council, commented about the announcement; " This is excellent news for Central Bedfordshire. This much needed bypass will not only relieve major traffic congestion for Dunstable and Houghton Regis and the surrounding area, but provide a massive economic boost, cementing Central Bedfordshire's position as a great location for innovation and opportunity. There is still a long way to go until the scheme is built, but this is a very positive step in the right direction."

The A5 M1 Link is the most important infrastructure need for Central Bedfordshire, and subject to the scheme successfully completing all the relevant statutory processes, work could start as soon as 2014.

Local MP Andrew Selous, commented following the news: "I have campaigned for a bypass for Dunstable, Houghton Regis and surrounding villages for over ten years. The deal with the developers and the restarting of the public inquiry is fantastic news for jobs and the local economy, including Leighton Buzzard, which will get fast direct access to the national motorway network."

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Government secures £50M boost towards A5-M1 link road in Bedfordshire

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Construction of the A5-M1 link road in Bedfordshire could be brought forward to start in 2014 after Roads Minister Mike Penning today announced the public inquiry would be re-started next year.

The move comes after the Government secured £45 million private sector investment for a new 2.9 mile congestion-tackling dual carriageway running east from the A5 north of Dunstable to the M1 at a new junction (J11a).

The scheme is intended to improve journey time reliability and safety by removing the need for long distance traffic to travel on the A5 through Dunstable.

The contribution - which totals £50m when combined with Central Bedfordshire Council's previous commitment to allocate £5 million Growth Area Funding - significantly reduces the level of Government investment needed to deliver the scheme.

This means work could start in 2014 - rather than sometime after 2015 - subject to successful completion of statutory processes and confirmation of value for money and affordability.

Mike Penning said:

"The budget deficit means we have had to make tough choices about investment priorities for the strategic road network, ensuring we get maximum value for money for every pound that we spend.

"I have said that private investment can help progress transport projects and the £50m contribution to the costs of the A5-M1 link road is an example of this.

"The third party funding significantly improves the return on public investment for this scheme and I am pleased to announce that the public inquiry, which was suspended last year, can be re-started. I'd like to thank the council and developers for their commitment to this scheme."

The Planning Inspectorate has now been asked by the Highways Agency to nominate an Independent Inspector to conduct the Inquiry. The Agency anticipates the Inquiry will be held in the New Year; however an announcement will be made when an inspector has been appointed and the date and venue arranged.

The A5-M1 link road scheme was originally due to go to Public Inquiry in June 2010. It was postponed due to the Government's Comprehensive Spending Review, the result of which – announced in October - was that the project was identified as a "future scheme" for start of work post 2015.

Following representations from Central Bedfordshire Council and developers Lands Improvement Holdings and Friends Life Company offering a contribution towards the cost of the scheme, the Secretary of State agreed that, subject to an agreement being in place for the contribution, the Public Inquiry would be re-started.

Details about the scheme including the Environmental Statement and other reports can be seen on the Highways Agency website at: www.highways.gov.uk/roads/projects/4472

Notes to Editors

The Highways Agency has today issued a public notice of the intention to hold a Public Inquiry into the A5 – M1 Link Road scheme.

The new link road would connect to the A5 just to the north of the existing A5/A505 roundabout junction.

The scheme aims to ease congestion on the A5 through Dunstable by providing an alternative route for road users between the A5 and the M1.

The scheme has a cost-range estimate of £156m to £212m.