

Report to Cabinet

7 February 2024

Subject:	A4123 Bus, Cycle & Walking Corridor – Initial scheme approval
Cabinet Member:	Councillor Peter Hughes Cabinet Member for Regeneration and WMCA,
Director:	Assistant Director - Growth & Spatial Planning Tammy Stokes
Key Decision:	Yes Type (b) - an executive decision which is likely to result in the Council incurring expenditure, the making of savings or the generation of income amounting to more than £1m. Type (c) – an executive decision which is significant in terms of its effect on communities living or working in an area comprising two or more wards of the Borough.
Contact Officer:	Andy Miller Strategic Planning & Transportation Manager andy_miller@sandwell.gov.uk Talvinder Sandhu Transportation Team Leader talvinder_sandhu@sandwell.gov.uk

1 Recommendations

- 1.1 that approval in principle is given to the proposed sustainable transport and highway improvement proposals that make up the A4123 Bus, Cycle and Walking Corridor in the Sandwell area, as part of an overall corridor project from Wolverhampton through Dudley and Sandwell as shown on the plans contained at Appendix A and B;



- 1.2 that the Assistant Director – Growth & Spatial Planning carries out public consultation on the proposals;
- 1.3 that the Assistant Director – Growth & Spatial Planning, in conjunction with the Interim Director of Finance & Section 151 Officer, and the Assistant Director – Legal and Assurance and Monitoring Officer, are authorised to accept City Region Sustainable Transport Fund grants from West Midlands Combined Authority under the Terms and Conditions contained in the Grant Agreements;
- 1.4 that the Cabinet Member for Environment and Highways considers any objections to the proposals, in conjunction with the Cabinet Member for Regeneration and WMCA;
- 1.5 that the Assistant Director – Growth & Spatial Planning is authorised to approve the submission of an Outline Business Case to the West Midlands Combined Authority;






2 Reasons for Recommendations

- 2.1 The A4123 Walk, Cycle and Bus Corridor forms part of the West Midlands City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement (CRSTS) Programme. It has received Strategic Outline Business Case (SOBC) approval through the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) Single Assurance Framework Process on the 25th of November 2022 and approval for funding to deliver a further section of a cycling and walking (Active Travel) route in Sandwell from the Burnt Tree junction to Lower City Road subject to design approval. This continues the route recently delivered from the Tipton Road junction to the Burnt Tree junction as part of Tranche 2 of the Active Travel Fund.
- 2.2 The project is now at the stage where proposals are sufficiently developed where specific approvals are required to enable the proposals to be consulted on with the public and other stakeholders, and then be taken to the next stages of the WMCA Single Assurance Framework Process and proposals submitted as part of an overall Outline Business Case (OBC) for the whole corridor.



2.3 Approval is also required to enter into grant agreements with the WMCA and accept grants for CRSTS funding to enable the scheme to be further developed, including the submission of business cases, to enable detailed design to be carried out, and following full approval, for the schemes to be constructed.

3 How does this deliver objectives of the Corporate Plan?

	<p><i>People live well and age well:</i> The A4123 Walk, Cycle and Bus Corridor includes extensive measures designed to encourage walking and cycling thus contributing to the health benefits of sustainable active travel.</p>
	<p><i>Strong resilient communities:</i> Successful communities need access to jobs, services and facilities to enable them to remain healthy and vibrant. The transport network is an important enabler of this.</p>
	<p><i>Quality homes in thriving neighbourhoods:</i> New and existing residential developments rely on good quality access and links to shops, services and leisure facilities in order for them to be successful. The proposals will make a significant contribution to this objective.</p>
	<p><i>A strong and inclusive economy:</i> The provision of a high-quality transport network will reduce journey times and improve journey reliability for Sandwell business who rely on it to connect to their suppliers and customers.</p>
	<p><i>A connected and accessible Sandwell:</i> The provision of a high-quality, sustainable transport network catering for all modes is vital to enable Sandwell residents to access jobs, education, and services both within and beyond the Borough's boundaries.</p>

4 Context and Key Issues

Background and Project Details

4.1 WMCA has an established Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP), a 10-year plan to create a strategic network of cycling routes across the West Midlands and a number of enhanced walking zones. This LCWIP includes this A4123 transport corridor and supports its objectives and the benefits for active travel it will achieve.



- 4.2 The A4123 Walk, Cycle and Bus Corridor project will provide a safe opportunity for the public to access and use active travel and improved bus services locally to travel to and from destinations along the A4123 in the Sandwell area and neighbouring linked destinations, which will include places of education, shops, jobs and businesses and other areas of interest and service. In addition, the project will provide improved wayfinding through new and improved signing and route information. The project will also link with completed sections further north, e.g., Burnt Tree to Tipton Road (cycle track and footways) and onwards further north to those sections of A4123 in Dudley and Wolverhampton under development as well with this project eventually providing a fully joined up corridor of active travel measures, which are also supported by the improved bus infrastructure elements under development. It is proposed the project work in Sandwell will be delivered by the Council.
- 4.3 The project that has been designed includes a dual cycle route along the A4123 and will link with a similar arrangement at the Burnt Tree junction. The Burnt Tree junction's active travel and bus infrastructure improvements are being developed currently by Transport for West Midlands (TfWM) and will provide an effective link between sections of the A4123, which includes the completed active travel route to Tipton Road and also to the proposed improvements to Lower City Road (see Dwg No. DR-CH-010019 at Appendix A). It is proposed that this section will be delivered in 2024/25 further to the funding agreement being made with the WMCA. The section of A4123 corridor from Lower City Road to the Hagley Road West junction in the south will be further developed further to agreement of the OBC and delivered between 2025 and 2027.
- 4.4 Alongside the cycle track which forms Option B, there are some suggested lengths of priority bus lane which are shown on plans that form Option C (attached at Appendix B) and are summarised below. At this stage they are simply suggestions, which will need the transport modelling, utilising the updated Strategic model from TfWM to validate and to show they provide not only bus priority but improvements to capacity and safety at the junctions for all transport, before they can be considered. The transport model update has only been completed recently in November 2023 and has unfortunately resulted in delays in modelling bus priority impacts along the A4123 for 4 months. In addition, consultation with TfWM and the bus service operator(s) would need to be undertaken to confirm the bus services need that priority at the various suggested locations to improve journey times, etc.



- 4.5 Improvements to the Tipton Road junction are being considered (see Dwg. No. DR-CH-010073 at Appendix B). These improvements are subject to the transport modelling outcomes but will provide an effective link for cyclists and pedestrians, including a link to the canal network and provision for other transport modes using the junction.
- 4.6 Improvements to the Portway Road Junction (Dwg. No. DR-CH-010080 at Appendix B) are proposed utilising Toucan type crossings to provide a safe crossing at the junction for pedestrians and cyclists. A left turn into Portway from the A4123 is also being considered at this junction. The introduction of bus lanes will require the crossing of the cycle track to the other side of the A4123. Please note the plan detailing a preliminary design is currently being prepared by the commissioned consultant.
- 4.7 It is proposed to improve the junctions at Lower City Road/City Road with the A4123 utilising a more effective combined single junction arrangement with the A4123 providing for a safer and more efficient movement of all transport modes through that junction and is essential to support the objectives of the A4123 walk/cycle and bus measures project. This will utilise findings from the strategic transport model working and is currently ongoing (See Dwg. No. CH-DR-010078 at Appendix B).
- 4.8 The Junction at Causeway Green is being considered for improvements for the crossing of the cyclists and pedestrians utilising the new infrastructure. An improvement to all vehicle movements including buses to improve capacity and reduce queuing will also be reviewed further to completion of the strategic transport modelling. There are some suggested bus priority measures shown on the plan, but will require removal of several trees, which is a measure we are seeking to avoid if possible or mitigate by planting new trees at a ratio of two trees for every tree removed if this is deemed feasible and viable (See Dwg. No. DR-CH-010083 at Appendix B).



4.9 The junction at Pound Road is being reviewed and traffic signals timing optimised to provide for the most effective movement of the new active travel measures and the other transport modes using the junction. There could be consideration of bus priority as shown on the (See Dwg. No. DR-CH-010082 at Appendix B), but would require some mature tree removal, which is not favourable. The short section shown going south might be more beneficial. A tree mitigation strategy is being considered to assess which options are deliverable.

4.10 Improvements to Queensway and Brandhall Road junctions (please see Appendix C) are proposed to support this project, with a summary of suggested measures as follows (these will be reviewed further using transport modelling to determine the most effective solution):

- more effective junction signalling linking the junctions with provision of Toucan type crossings to facilitate a safer movement for pedestrians and cyclists crossing to schools and local amenities.
- The inclusion of right turns into Queensway, Parsons Hill and Brandhall Road from the A4123. This will improve capacity and safety for all users of the junction and will also support improved bus journey times.
- Relocation of some bus stops nearer to signals and pedestrian desire lines to encourage a more safe and greater use of the bus services.

Suggested bus lanes shown on the plan, which if validated through transport modelling, and considered beneficial, would require modification to side road entry to the junction to allow for the introduction of the bus lane. A consideration of City Regional Sustainable Transport Settlement (CRSTS) funding for early delivery of this junction is being made and would support the OBC submission to WMCA for SAF approval.

4.11 The Junction at Bleakhouse Road is being reviewed further to the transport modelling and will consider the introduction of Turn Left lanes, which will improve safety and movement for all users including improved journey times for bus services. There is a suggestion of bus lanes to both sides from this junction to the Hagley Road West junction (see Dwg. No. DR-CH-010086 at Appendix B).

4.12 The potential to introduce a Mobility Hub (see Dwg. No. DR-CH-010088 at Appendix B) is being investigated at the junction of Hagley Road West



and the A4123. Opportunities for Electric Vehicle charging points, cycle parking, and cycle hire docks to be implemented in one location as part of the hub are being investigated. It is proposed to keep as much of the existing green area as possible and no trees will be removed in this proposal. It will provide opportunity for greater integration of transport modes with use of active travel and sustainable transport and providing links to nearby bus services to other centres along the A4123 corridor and into Birmingham and Halesowen along the A456 corridor.

- 4.13 Please note there are a number of other side roads joining the A4123 which are being carefully considered for the priority of pedestrians and cyclists crossing junctions. There has been a Speed Limit Review Study undertaken which is reaching its conclusion and may recommend the reduction of speed limits along certain sections of the corridor. However, the keeping of a free-flowing traffic where possible is also being included in any recommendations further to the review with other options to calm traffic and encourage safe turning of all transport modes in and out of side roads being considered as well.
- 4.14 The use of a 'CYCLOPS' approach is also being considered for possible use at junctions along the corridor and may possibly include junctions in Sandwell. It is an innovative design approach utilising an external orbital cycle track separating cyclists from vehicular traffic in time and space, enabling multi modal transport conflicts at junctions to be managed safely. It has been successfully utilised in the City of Manchester and other Greater Manchester towns. Its use however would be subject to the transport modelling completion to ensure it would not reduce capacity at junctions along the A4123 corridor, as well as meeting design safety standards.
- 4.13 This project will involve the challenge of existing trees and some other planting clashing with the proposed cycle route. This is recognised in the Sandwell area and proposals are looking to keep as many of the existing trees as possible. Design considerations have been made to the cycle track width and its route to limit tree removal. However, in the event some trees need removing, that may also be diseased/damaged in some way, they will be replaced in a greater number by appropriate healthy trees as near to the original location as possible. A tree mitigation strategy for the project is currently being developed, which will encompass the recommendations of current tree strategies along the corridor and includes Sandwell Borough Council's tree strategy. A consideration is also be made to request CRSTS funding early to plant



trees at an early stage that are needed to replace those that will need to be removed for project delivery.

- 4.14 As part of the OBC work the links to off road routes provided by Sustrans, for example routes NCN 54 and NCN 81, which could link effectively with the new cycle route on the A4123 will be explored to encourage a greater take up cycling, especially for short journeys.. The promotional initiative for this project will seek to encourage the development of new (and support existing) leisure events and facilities to nurture and develop a culture of cycling and active travel for all and include those that do not currently cycle.

Funding and timescales

- 4.15 This scheme has £29.0 million City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement (CRSTS) funding to deliver the corridor by 2027. The section of the A4123 from Burnt Tree to Lower City Road (excluding the Lower City Road Junction) is proposed for delivery in 2024/25 by Sandwell Borough Council as early funding has been allocated for this section. The remaining length of the A4123 corridor in Sandwell area will be delivered in sections during the period 2025 to 2027. Minimising disruption to all users of the A4123 and providing Network Resilience is essential and Black Country Transport and Sandwell Borough Council officers are working with TfWM officers to ensure this achieved during delivery stages of the project. It is proposed that the Full Business Case, which follows SAF approval of the Outline Business Case by WMCA will provide a more defined programme for delivery.
- 4.16 The entire corridor is expected to cost more than the £29.0 million allocated. A prioritisation exercise will take place to ascertain which section of the scheme will be delivered in this CRSTS period. However, it is requested that approval in principle is given for the entire scheme in Sandwell so that delivery can subsequently happen in sections according to funding allocations. The remaining scheme will be delivered using additional funding to be sought through a subsequent round of CRSTS or other Government Funding.



Consultation

- 4.17 The scheme in full has not yet been subject to public consultation. A comprehensive public consultation exercise is planned for early 2024 to ascertain local views around the proposed interventions. This will be supported by a public exhibition at locations in both Sandwell and Dudley.
- 4.18 Stakeholder agreement to the scheme has been sought previously through the assurance and appraisal process at the WMCA who have approved the Strategic Outline Business Case. Following this Cabinet review, the Outline Business Case will be submitted to the WMCA for approval, allowing for the release of funding for the final development stage (Full Business Case), and for some funding for early delivery of some elements of the scheme.

5 Alternative Options

- 5.1 One alternative option is to not continue with the scheme and reallocate the funding back to the WMCA for spending on a different scheme. This is not recommended, as it would limit the essential connections to nearby communities and amenities for all users for business, education, and other services. There is no guarantee that Sandwell Council would be able to retain the funding for a different scheme, and therefore Sandwell residents may be disadvantaged against other areas in the region.
- 5.2 Another alternative is to make significant changes to the scheme as it is drawn currently. This is not recommended as it would make it difficult to deliver by 2027 and would risk the funding being reclaimed.



6 Implications

<p>Resources:</p>	<p>The project will be funded through devolved allocations to the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) as part of its City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement. All fees, including SMBC staff time recharges, are including the estimated scheme cost.</p> <p>Currently £500,000 is allocated to complete the development (Outline Business Case) of the project along the A4123 corridor and £1,200,000 for the design and delivery of the Sandwell section, Burnt Tree to Lower City Road.</p>
<p>Legal and Governance:</p>	<p>The scheme involves the Council carrying out works in its capacity as Local Highway Authority.</p> <p>The proposed scope of works covered under this report are in furtherance of the City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement (CRSTS), which is overseen by the Department for Transport (DfT). Since the CRSTS programme was confirmed in April 2022, Sandwell officers alongside counterparts from neighbouring authorities involved in the scheme continue to co-ordinate programme planning and delivery arrangements. This will be reflected in any necessary notices or procurement works.</p> <p>The grant agreements have been reviewed and it is confirmed that these are in line with the Council's objectives and that the necessary authority exists to enter into all necessary legal transactions in relation to these arrangements.</p> <p>The delegations described in the report are in accordance with paragraph 1.3 of Part 4 (Executive Procedure Rules) of the Constitution.</p>



Risk:	A full Risk Assessment will accompany the Outline Business Case. This is a precondition of funding.
Equality:	<p>An Equality impact Assessment will accompany the Outline Business Case. This is a precondition of funding.</p> <p>The project will support marginalised and vulnerable groups providing greater opportunity for all to travel to services and jobs safely and affordably. It will also provide opportunity for greater social interaction between all members of the community.</p>
Health and Wellbeing:	<p>The project includes measures aimed to encourage the use of sustainable, non-car, modes. This will contribute towards improved air quality.</p> <p>The active travel measures along a segregated route for walking and cycling will also give a greater opportunity for safe and effective exercise providing proven physical and mental health and wellbeing benefits to the local communities.</p>
Social Value:	<p>There are no social value implications arising from the recommendations contained in this report.</p> <p>When the scheme moves to the delivery stage, the appointed contractor(s) will be required to adhere to the Council's Social Value policies.</p>
Climate Change:	<p>Decarbonisation of the transport system is central to the government's aims and objectives for CRSTS. It is also a principal theme within the West Midlands Local Transport Plan. All projects within the programme need to demonstrate how they address climate change and contribute to decarbonisation through their business cases. This project will provide opportunity for a greater use of active travel and sustainable bus services options instead of car use for such journeys providing many benefits, which include reduced carbon outputs and improved air quality, reduced car use and reduced congestion particularly at pinch points along the A4123 at daily peak times in morning and evening, greater journey time reliability</p>



	and resilience and a reduced journey time variability with the bus travel. An outcome of the project will be an improved environment.
Corporate Parenting:	There are no implications for Corporate Parenting responsibilities arising from the recommendations contained in this report.

7. Appendix A

Option B (Cycle route and limited bus priority)

Dwg. No. DR-CH-010016 PO4
Dwg. No. DR-CH-010017 PO4
Dwg. No. DR-CH-010018 PO4
Dwg. No. DR-CH-010019 PO4
Dwg. No. DR-CH-010020 PO3
Dwg. No. DR-CH-010022 PO3
Dwg. No. DR-CH-010023 PO3
Dwg. No. DR-CH-010024 PO3
Dwg. No. DR-CH-010025 PO3
Dwg. No. DR-CH-010026 PO3
Dwg. No. DR-CH-010027 PO3
Dwg. No. DR-CH-010028 PO3

Appendix B

Option C (Cycle Route and Full bus priority)

Dwg. No. DR-CH-010075 PO2
Dwg. No. DR-CH-010076 PO2
Dwg. No. DR-CH-010077 PO2
Dwg. No. DR-CH-010078 PO2
Dwg. No. DR-CH-010079 PO1.01
Dwg. No. DR-CH-010080 PO1.01
Dwg. No. DR-CH-010081 PO1.01
Dwg. No. DR-CH-010082 PO1.01
Dwg. No. DR-CH-010083 PO1.01
Dwg. No. DR-CH-010084 PO1.01
Dwg. No. DR-CH-010085 PO1.01
Dwg. No. DR-CH-010086 PO1.01
Dwg. No. DR-CH-010087 PO1.01



Appendix C – Indicative layout for Wolverhampton Road/Queensway Junction

8. Background Papers

West Midlands Strategic Transport Plan: Movement for Growth (2016)
Strategic Outline Business Case (SOBC) approved by WMCA (2023)

