

MINUTES

Title of Meeting:	Orwell Bridge Closure 22 November 2016 – Strategic Meeting
Purpose or Mandate:	To discuss the impact of the Orwell Bridge closure on 22 November 2016 and potential changes to existing policy / protocol
Date:	2016-12-19
Place:	The Orwell Room, Grafton House, 15-17 Russell Road, Ipswich, IP1 2DE
Times:	11.00 – 12.30 hrs
Attended:	<p>Suffolk County Council - James Finch (Chairman); Mark Stevens; Alan Thorndyke; Sally Harper; Ryan De'Ath; Joseph Hough; Peter Grimm; Tanya Stone</p> <p>Highways England - Simon Amor; Nigel Allsopp</p> <p>Suffolk Police and Crime Commissioner - Tim Passmore; Sandra Graffham</p> <p>Police - Inspector Tim Lusher</p> <p>Suffolk Businesses - Steve Britt; Nick Burfield; Paul Davey; Terry Baxter</p> <p>Ipswich Borough Council - Russell Williams</p> <p>Suffolk Coastal District Council - Paul Wood</p> <p>Babergh District Council - Tom Barker</p> <p>Suffolk Joint Emergency Planning Unit - Neal Evans</p>
Minute-taker:	Tanya Stone

Item No.	Item Description	Relevant business considered, facts noted, the decision taken and its rationale
1.	Introduction / Purpose of Meeting	<p>We have an ongoing shared responsibility to find ways of avoiding the issues of congestion that arose in Ipswich on 22 November, from ever happening again. There is no one simple solution and resource must not be considered a constraint at this stage. Challenges need to be identified and working groups formed, to work towards finding solutions, for the short-term, medium-term and long-term.</p> <p>The meeting provided the opportunity to have feedback on what went well and not so well, leading up to, and on the actual day of the bridge closure.</p> <p>It is important to note that, in addition to operational, financial, and economic impacts, there were also emotional effects on some individuals.</p>
<p><i>Actions Agreed, Target Date (s), Lead Officer (s):</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Simon Amor to arrange a workshop for the end of January to be led by Martin Fellows (East Division Director, Highways England). 		

2.	Impact of Orwell Bridge Closure	<p>a) <u>Businesses</u> Accepted closure for safety reasons.</p> <p>There were major issues with staff getting in to work, public transport could not get around and goods could not be delivered. Diversions were also considered unclear and a lack of communication was top of the list.</p> <p>Could we have introduced a stacking area and permitted low height vehicles to continue across the bridge?</p> <p>b) <u>Port of Felixstowe</u> Not too badly affected, as high winds were forecast and they reduced/removed bookings through their Vehicle Booking System (VBS).</p> <p>c) <u>NHS</u> No evidence recorded, however in general terms many staff including doctors and nurses were unable to reach hospital and appointments, requiring re-distribution of resource and extended shifts. A closure of this length had a considerable impact, not just financially, but for patients in particular, an emotional impact too.</p> <p>d) <u>Passenger Transport</u> Bus operators lost hundreds of miles in running time. (One particular operator lost 1000 miles and had to cancel 100 services). The event also hit school transport badly, with some Special Educational Needs passengers travelling in vehicles for over three hours, impacting on their health and wellbeing.</p> <p>Concern that the A14 was closed between Seven Hills and Copdock interchanges. The closure could have impacted less if the A14 was closed between Nacton and Wherstead interchanges.</p> <p>e) <u>Wider Community</u> The Police had insufficient resource to support all diversion routes. HGVs were reported to block roads whilst trying to manoeuvre along alternative roads.</p> <p>Although there is a signed diversion route, many drivers used alternative routes using SatNavs and local knowledge.</p> <p>Local retailers' productivity dropped severely, with one retailer reporting a loss of £40k in just two hours. Staff could not get in to work.</p> <p>There appeared to be insufficient communication updates provided e.g. at 9.50am many drivers thought it was ok to</p>
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		<p>travel in to Ipswich, as last communication suggested the bridge would most likely be open by 9am.</p> <p>Communication was a serious problem, with people reporting a lack of awareness of what was happening. There needs to be an effective communications plan and updates shared with all those affected.</p> <p>Feel there is less confidence in Suffolk's infrastructure being able to cope with the economic growth agenda.</p> <p>The impact of this closure was considered the worst yet and should not be allowed to happen again.</p> <p>Should HGVs have been restricted before they reached Ipswich, to avoid Ipswich having a major disruption?</p> <p>Could roads have been open for longer?</p>
<p><i>Actions Agreed, Target Date (s), Lead Officer (s):</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Paul Davey to check when the Port of Felixstowe decided to act and restrict access to the Port. 		
3.	Joint Emergency Planning Unit	<p>A severe weather warning was provided by the Met Office mid-morning on 21 Nov. A teleconference followed at 15.30hrs with the Suffolk Resilience Forum (SRF) Group (consisting of the Police, Suffolk County Council, Highways England, Ambulance and NHS services). Communications went out at 16.00hrs to all parties incl. other agencies, stating the bridge may be closed. At 20.00hrs there was a further SRF Group teleconference and a press release followed.</p> <p>Existing protocol is for the bridge to be closed for safety reasons when wind speeds exceed 50mph on the bridge. (Note: There is a device on top of the bridge that records wind speeds). In addition, on 22 Nov the wind direction was in a southerly direction, which was at 90° to the bridge, so the worst case scenario.</p> <p>The closure was set at 01.00hrs as the roads were quieter and safer for those implementing the closure.</p> <p>A further teleconference was held at 06.30hrs following a report from the Met Office that winds may not reach a peak before 09.00hrs and they were unsure how long they would remain above the existing wind threshold. The wind did not abate until around 12 noon, and the closure took around an hour to remove.</p>
4.	Potential changes to the existing policy/protocol	<p>Each day, around 100,000 vehicles use roads in Ipswich - When this diversion was put in place on 22 Nov, this would have forced around 70% of traffic on to other roads leading in to the town. We could consider changing the agreed diversion route, however people choose their own way to some degree. We could also consider restricting traffic rather</p>

		than closing roads in future. HGVs still need to deliver goods e.g. to shops. Communication is also key, as it is important everyone is fully aware of the consequences of a road closure and what it means for them.
5.	Way forward, actions, communications and ongoing engagement	<p>The following will be taken forward in working groups:</p> <p>Improve Communication Plan (<i>Simon Amor/Ryan De'ath to lead</i>) – Review key contacts (critical Ipswich infrastructure list) and revise the plan to ensure more regular updates are provided in future. Consider communication methods e.g. updates to the media could be in the form of phone calls during out-of-hours. Also look in to whether businesses/hauliers could subscribe to text or email alerts, advising of emergency situations affecting the highway network, so they could forward messages to their staff. Look at developing an App for mobiles, as another way of communication updates. Make sure messages are clear, as high winds on a bridge may not be happening elsewhere. People may assume that since they have no wind at home, there is unlikely to be high winds on the bridge.</p> <p>Physical Logistics and Traffic Management (<i>Simon Amor/Mark Stevens to lead</i>) – To include looking at vehicles that could continue across the bridge; use of barriers/segregation/traffic stacking (including identifying local businesses with yards that could provide HGV parking for a short period); wind baffles; wording on matrix warning signs to be more informative.</p> <p>Working groups should also re-visit any ideas discounted from previous reviews.</p> <p>Looking ahead to the future, the proposal for a Northern Relief Road is now at the early planning stages and this will provide a longer-term solution to this problem.</p> <p>As these situations occur very rarely, it is important plans are reviewed/practised at least annually (e.g. in an exercise room), to ensure all involved know what to do, how and when.</p> <p><u>Post Meeting Note:</u> Following this meeting, a press release went out to the media – see Appendix A</p>
<p><i>Actions Agreed, Target Date (s), Lead Officer (s):</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Simon Amor / Ryan De'ath / Mark Stevens to action above. 		

Minutes of this meeting can be made accessible to all staff and the public.

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