

Cabinet
12 October 2016

A Gateway to Northern Devon – the Strategy for the A361 & A39 (NDLR)

Report of the Head of Planning, Transportation and Environment

Please note that the following recommendations are subject to consideration and determination by the Cabinet (and confirmation under the provisions of the Council's Constitution) before taking effect.

Recommendation: That Cabinet

- (a) notes the results of the public consultation;
- (b) agrees that the Strategic Outline Business Case be submitted to the Department for Transport (DfT);
- (c) agrees that, if approved by DfT, its additional funding is applied to the scheme's development in 2016/17 and 2017/18.

1. Summary

This report follows the Cabinet report dated July 2014 regarding the North Devon Link Road (NDLR) project. It updates the Cabinet on recent progress and the further programme of work for this scheme.

2. Background/Introduction

The A39/A361 corridor between Bideford and the M5 forms the principal road connection between northern Devon and both the M5 junction 27 and the strategic rail network at Tiverton Parkway. The NDLR is one of the few stretches of strategic highway in Devon, identified in the Local Transport Plan, for which Devon County Council has direct responsibility; the remainder being the responsibility of Highways England. As such, the County Council has the responsibility to maintain and improve it as needed, and by doing so creating an improved "Gateway to Northern Devon" and thereby helping to address the poorly performing nature of the northern Devon economy.

The NDLR carries varying numbers of business users, commuters and tourists, depending on the location and time of year. This mix of traffic leads to poor journey time reliability and congestion in peak commuting periods around Barnstaple/Bideford. This is exacerbated in peak holiday periods when congestion can occur at numerous locations along the route; a situation made worse by the number and variety of type of junctions which act as pinch points, often causing congestion on the main and side roads.

There is considerable employment and housing development planned along the route over the next 15-20 years, with 2,000 dwellings at Tiverton, 1,200 at South Molton, 4,100 at Barnstaple and 4,100 in the Bideford area, with smaller levels elsewhere at locations such as 1,400 at Ilfracombe, 400 at Braunton and 600 in Torrington. The particular pressure points on the network are at key urban junctions in the vicinity of Barnstaple and Bideford, between Barnstaple and South Molton and in the Tiverton area.

The existing and forecast traffic flows at the various sections of the route are shown in Appendix 1.

The following problems have been identified which can be partially or wholly attributed to the performance of the NDLR. These form the basis as reasons to consider improvements:

- Northern Devon's economy is among the most poorly performing in the UK and has significant untapped potential;
- Although the number of collisions is relatively low compared to other Devon A Roads, the severity issue (the number of fatal and serious incidents as a proportion of the whole) is higher than other comparable roads;
- Long delays and diversion routes occur during routine maintenance works or when an accident happens – causing problems for residents, businesses, and visitors.
- Congestion during peak hours (morning and afternoon between Barnstaple and Bideford, and during peak tourist periods along the entire route between Bideford and Tiverton).
- Low average speeds (47mph on the 60mph section between Tiverton and Bideford) and limited overtaking opportunities for long distances offers a poor gateway to northern Devon.

Following the public consultation held in 2014, work progressed on potential improvement options for the NDLR corridor. This included 4 options:

- Public transport
- Junction only improvements
- Junction + link improvements between Bideford and South Molton
- Dual carriageway.

As a result of an initial assessment the dual carriageway option was not taken forward for public consultation. A dual carriageway would provide the biggest benefits but this is very high cost, probably unaffordable in the context of the DfT's available Large Local Majors budget, and would have a large impact on the environment as a new alignment and large scale junction improvements would be necessary. This would require large areas of land, compulsory purchase orders, public inquiries and make the whole process undeliverable within the DfT timescales of having the scheme onsite by 2020.

Public transport options were also not taken forward to public consultation as part of this scheme because they could not achieve the fully enhanced connectivity necessary to support economic growth. This does not however mean that further improvements to the Exeter – Barnstaple rail line will not be justified in future as part of a wider connectivity package.

Outline design plans of the two remaining options were undertaken, together with a preliminary traffic and environmental assessment. This was summarised in the recent 2016 Options Consultation leaflet which was part of the material used in a public consultation. The consultation ran from 27th June until 12th August after being extended by two weeks at the request of the local MP.

3. Proposal

Taking all of the public comments into account and in parallel with additional design, environmental, traffic and economic work that has also been conducted, it is proposed to make a Strategic Outline Business Case bid to the DfT for scheme funding from the Local Majors Fund. The scheme will include:

- Improvements to seven junctions between Borners Bridge and Heywood Road roundabout (Borners Bridge, West Buckland, Landkey, Portmore, Rumsam, Westleigh, Heywood Road);
- A new junction at Brynsworthy to the west of the current A39 Roundswell roundabout;
- Additional overtaking lanes from Filleigh Estate to Portmore Roundabout and from the new junction at Brynsworthy to Westleigh; and

- Given that the traffic flows are much higher around Barnstaple, the proposal is for an urban four-lane road on this section, between Landkey and Brynsworthy. This would be 2 lanes in each direction (including widening the river and rail bridge over the Taw) without a central reservation but the speed limit would have to be reduced to maximum of 50mph. This would offer a step change in capacity and the best value for money for this section.

A schematic plan showing the proposed improvements is included in Appendix 2.

The second stage of scheme assessment has commenced on the presumption that the Strategic Outline Business Case is accepted by DfT. This will consider the individual elements of the scheme which is approximately 30km long. It is likely that various constraints will reduce the size of the final scheme taking account of more detailed traffic modelling, environmental surveys, design and land ownership constraints. Such constraints may also impede the deliverability of parts of the scheme.

The section between South Molton and the M5 has also been identified as needing a review in terms of overtaking opportunities, junction safety/capacity and access to Tiverton Parkway. This work will be carried out as a separate commission when funding has been identified.

4. Consultations/Representations/Technical Data

Over 1,300 people responded to the consultation by completing an online questionnaire or by making additional written responses; over 95% of people agreed that there was a need to make improvements to the NDLR. There was strong support for improvements to the sections between South Molton and Bideford. The majority of people preferred link and junction improvements option with much less support for the junctions only option. Although not an option included in the consultation, approximately 30% of respondents suggested further consideration should be given to a dual carriageway and 50% proposed the section between South Molton and the M5 be looked at. A more detailed summary of the results is included in Appendix 3.

In addition to the public consultation, a business survey was also carried out consisting of face-to face interviews with larger businesses in the area whilst smaller businesses completed an online questionnaire. This survey identified that the main constraints to businesses in the northern Devon area are the local transport links and the road links to the rest of the country. 41% of businesses identified that making improvements to the NDLR would have a positive impact on their turnover in the future. A more detailed summary of the business survey results is included in Appendix 4.

5. Financial Considerations

The DfT has already granted DCC £600k to complete the first stage of the study and the majority of this funding will have been spent on achieving this when the Strategic Outline Business Case is submitted. The initial commitment from the DfT identified that an additional £900k would be made available to DCC in financial year 2017/18 to complete stage 2 of the study, subject to the scheme identified at the end of stage 1 showing '*satisfactory progress and the likelihood of a value for money scheme emerging.*' Officers are liaising with the DfT to allow some of this money to be brought forward to this 2016/17 financial year. This would allow an Outline Business Case to be prepared by the end of 2017. The timely approval of this by the DfT would improve the prospects of the scheme meeting the overall project deadline of starting onsite by March 2020 and a decision on bringing the funding forward will be made soon by the DfT.

The total cost of the proposals that will be included in the Strategic Outline Business Case is approximately £200m. The success of a future bid to the DfT Large Local Majors Fund is dependent on a number of factors including an element of match funding.

A capital bid to the Large Local Majors Fund for works will need to be submitted to the DfT by autumn 2017 when the Outline Business Case is ready. A bid of £200m is likely to be greater than the funding available from both central Government, and the ability to find local match funding in one go. There are also limitations as to which sections could be included in a bid at that time where, for example, land has not been secured. It is therefore likely that the NDLR improvements will need to be split into two phases with the initial phase included in the autumn 2017 bid. The second phase bid would be made when further national and local funding was available.

The local contribution has yet to be fully identified. Options include capital receipts, Local Transport Plan, corporate borrowing, developer contributions, New Homes Bonus (County and District Councils) and capital funding from the Councils. It is also understood that LEP Growth Deal round 1 expenditure on short term schemes at Portmore, Roundswell and Heywood Road can be included as local match but this requires further confirmation from the DfT.

As part of the local match funding Devon County Council has already committed £1m out of Corporate Capital Receipts over the next 5 years towards the design of the scheme in parallel to the DfT commitment. This is likely to be used towards the end of the design period but may be required earlier depending on the DfT funding arrangement.

6. Environmental Impact Considerations

Initial desktop environmental studies have been carried out to identify any major 'showstoppers' to the project. The next stage of the project will see detailed surveys carried out to identify the current situation and to give an indication of mitigation measures required.

The final scheme will require an Environmental Statement which will trigger a planning application.

7. Equality Considerations

Equality considerations will be considered as part of the scheme option development and included in reports on future individual schemes. This may include impacts such as the ability to cross the road. Impact assessments for the different scheme elements will be included when full scheme approval reports are brought to Cabinet.

8. Legal Considerations

There are no specific legal considerations at this stage. They will be considered in future reports on individual schemes.

9. Risk Management Considerations

All Risk Management Considerations will be taken into account when detailed scheme designs are produced. Key risks are:

- Land ownership issues delaying progress
- The length of the scheme means the design process could take longer than envisaged, with cost overruns
- Environmental constraints are identified which limit the options for any improvement
- The bridge widening proves technically challenging
- The benefit to cost ratio is not sufficiently robust

- The planning application runs into difficulties
- Lack for funding for the capital works from both the DfT and Local Contributions.

10. Public Health Impact

The air quality in locations near dwellings may need to be modelled as part of scheme development including the indirect impact of any increased traffic levels on roads linking to the A361 / A39. Opportunities to improve options for increasing levels of physical activity through walking and cycling, for example better crossing facilities, will be considered in the detailed design stage.

11. Options/Alternatives

Options and alternatives have been considered at as part of the scheme development process:

- Doing nothing could be a long term detriment to the economy of northern Devon
- A dual carriageway would be the most beneficial scheme for the local economy but has been discounted for a number of reasons
- Public transport improvements could not deliver the necessary improvements in connectivity on their own
- The proposed scheme for improving the section of road between South Molton and Bideford by a combination of widening the existing carriageway and improving junctions is the most pragmatic and deliverable way forward.

12. Reason for Recommendation/Conclusion

There is a need to submit a Strategic Outline Business Case to the DfT in autumn 2016 in order to keep to the timescales to be in a position to start construction in March 2020. If this submission date is not achieved, the probability of receiving funding through the Local Majors Fund is significantly reduced.

Dave Black
Head of Planning, Transportation and Environment

Electoral Divisions: **Willand and Uffculme; Tiverton East; Tiverton West; South Molton Rural; Chumleigh and Swimbridge; Barnstaple North; Barnstaple South; Fremington Rural; Northam; Bideford East; and Bideford South and Hartland**

Cabinet Member for Economy, Growth and Cabinet Liaison for Exeter: Councillor Andrew Leadbetter

Strategic Director, Place: Heather Barnes

Local Government Act 1972: List of Background Papers

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Background Paper

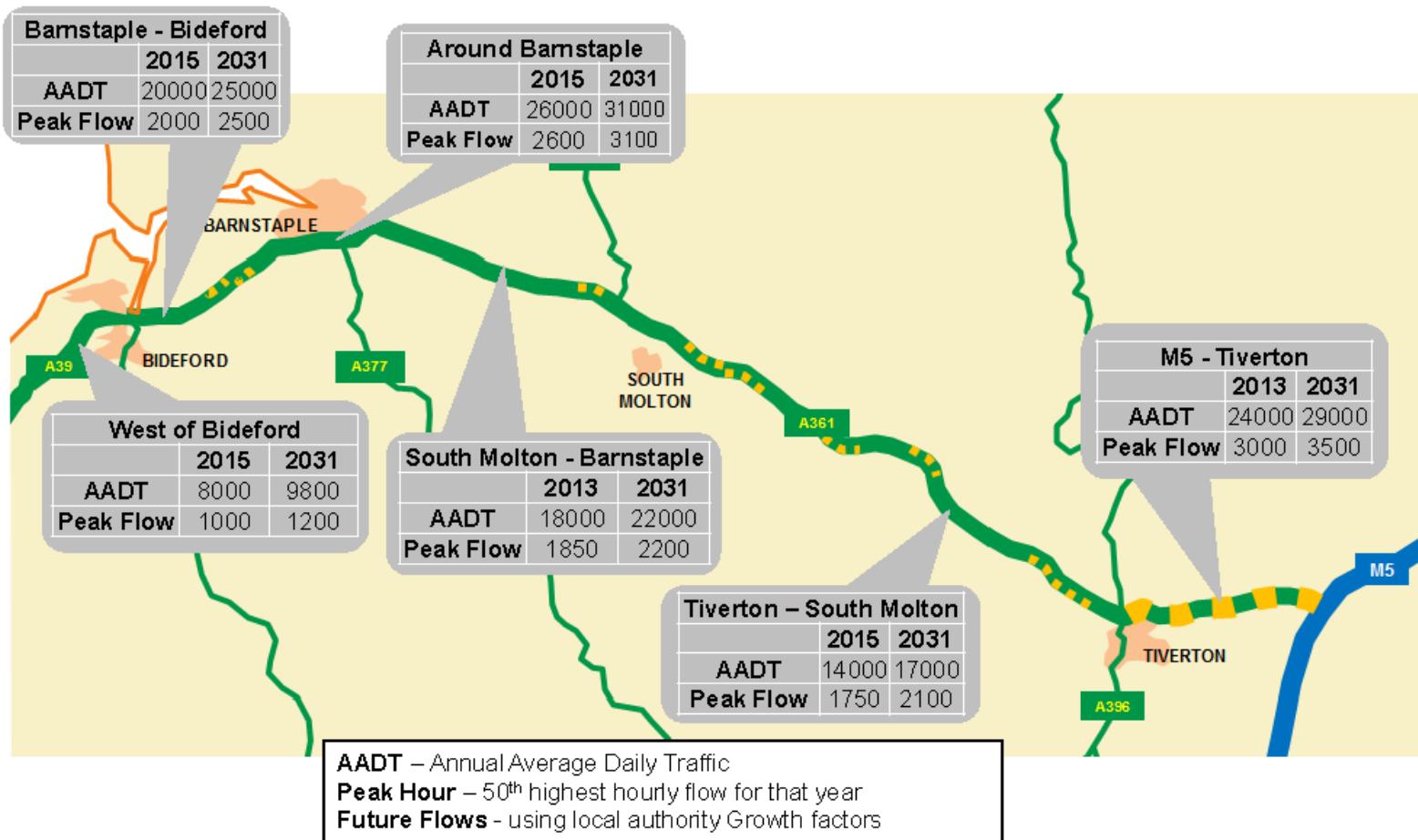
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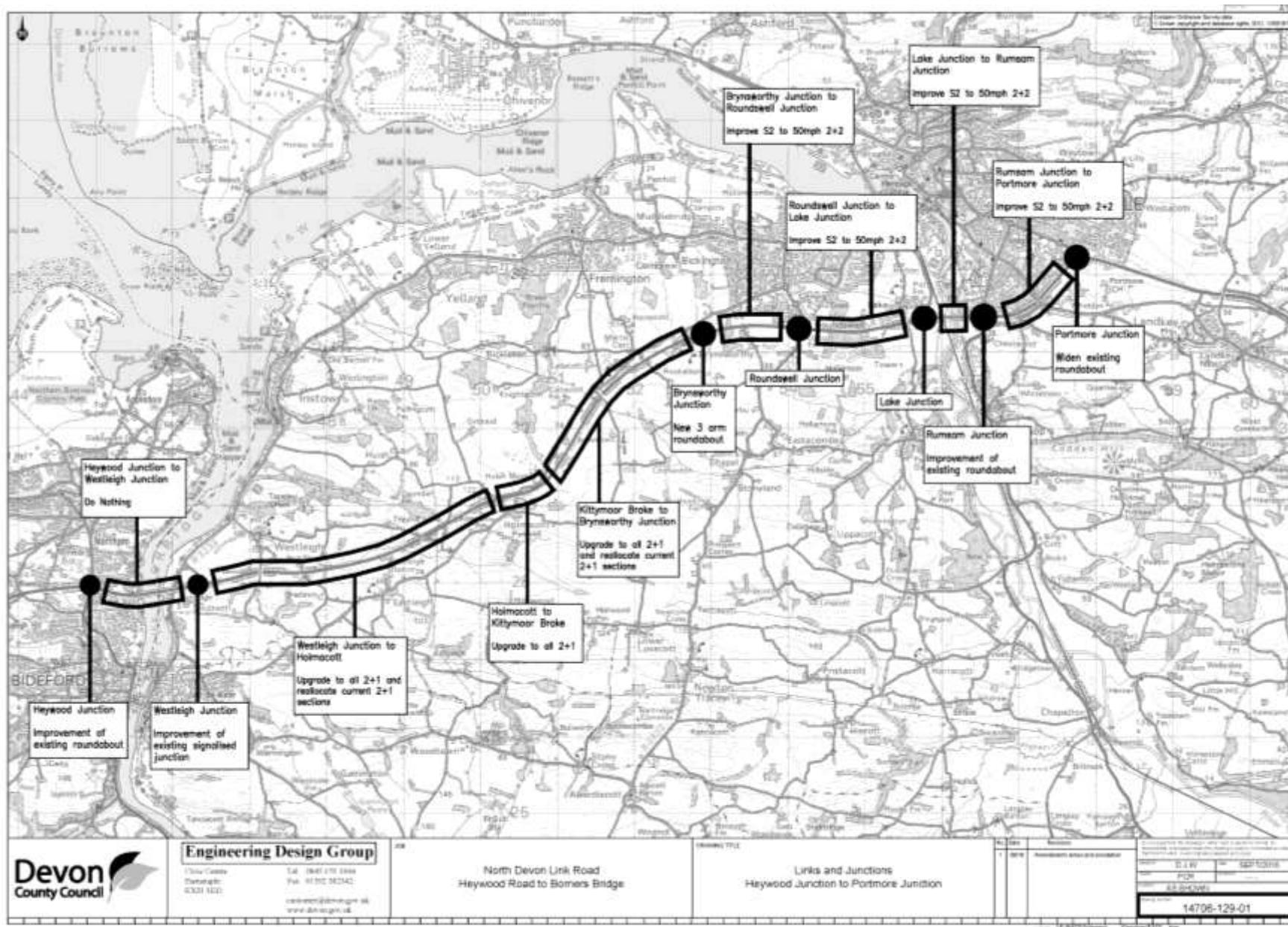
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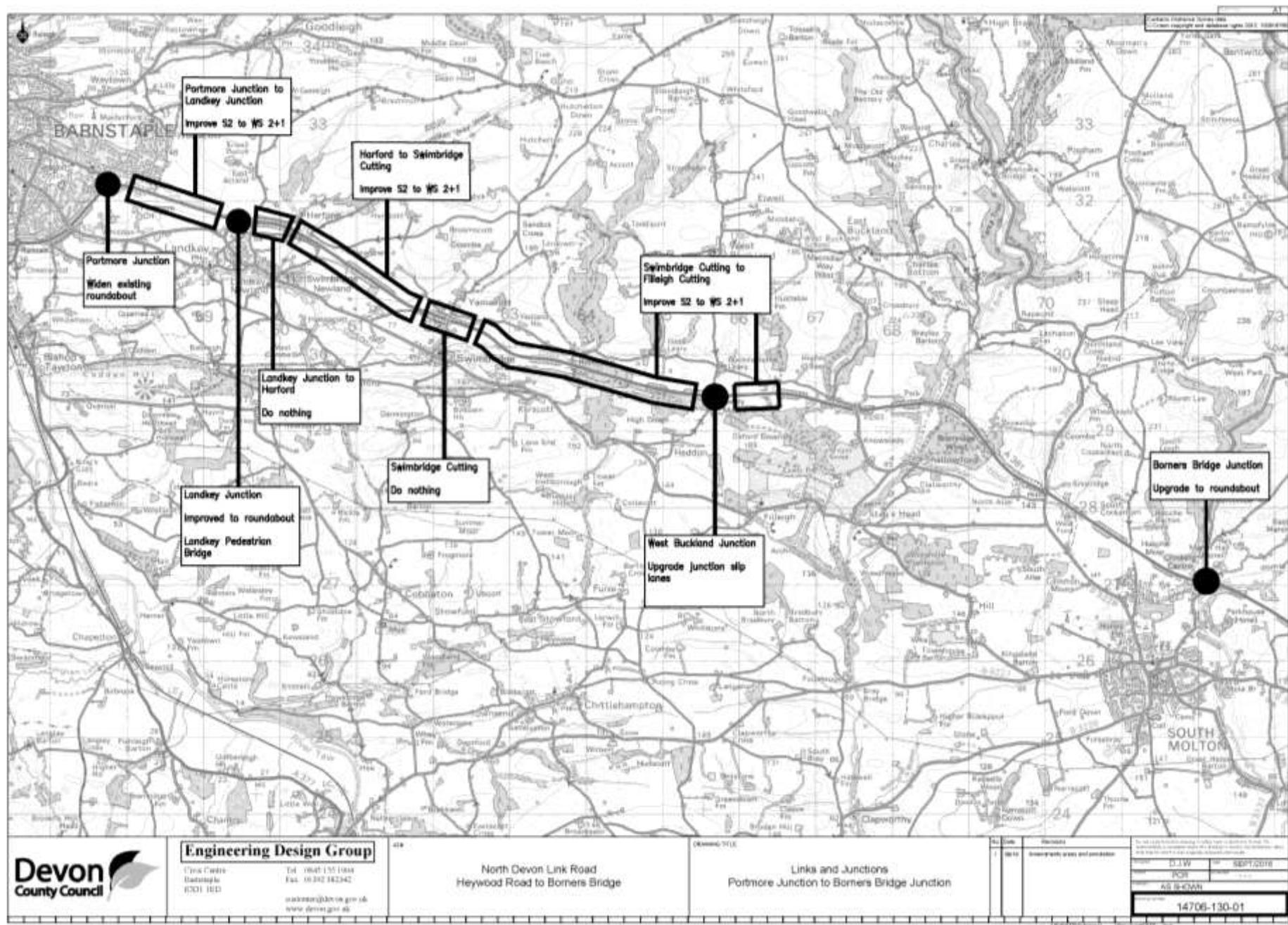
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Current Traffic & Future Traffic Levels



**Appendix 2
To PTE/16/46**





Appendix 3 To PTE/16/46

Summary of online consultation responses

Summer 2016

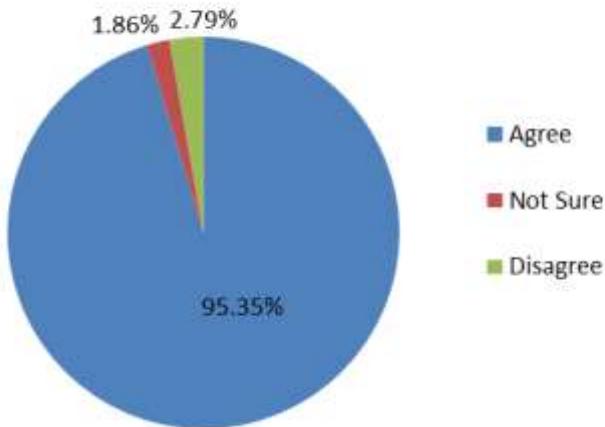
This document contains a summary of the preliminary analysis from the NDLR consultation undertaken in summer 2016. Free text analysis figures are for guidance only and are not exact.

In total, 1325 responses were collected. Plotting of respondents postcodes shows that views were collected across the study area.



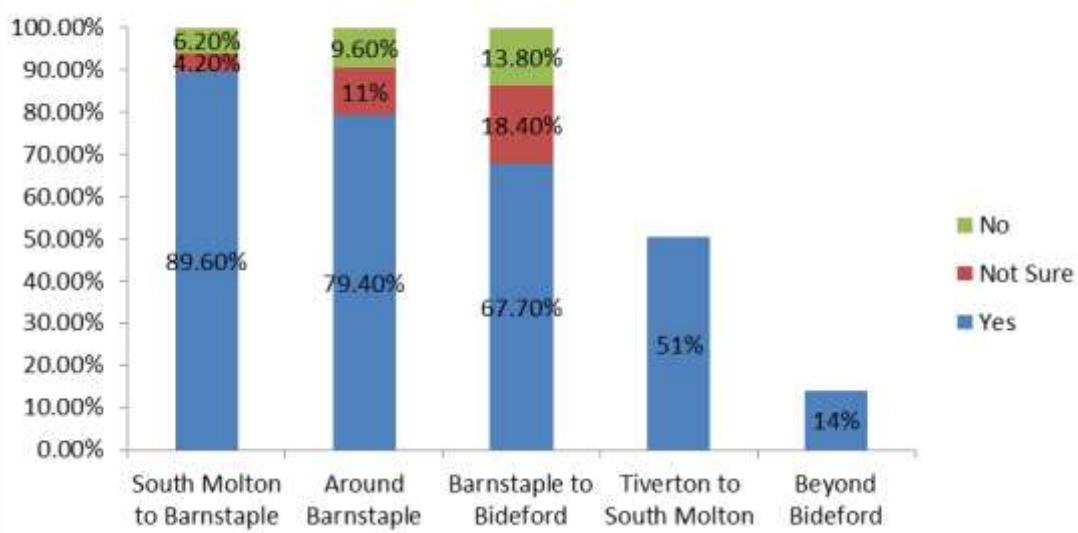
Figure 1: Mapping showing respondents location (South West Postcodes only)

Do you agree or disagree that there is a need to make improvements to the North Devon Link Road for the reasons identified in the proposals?



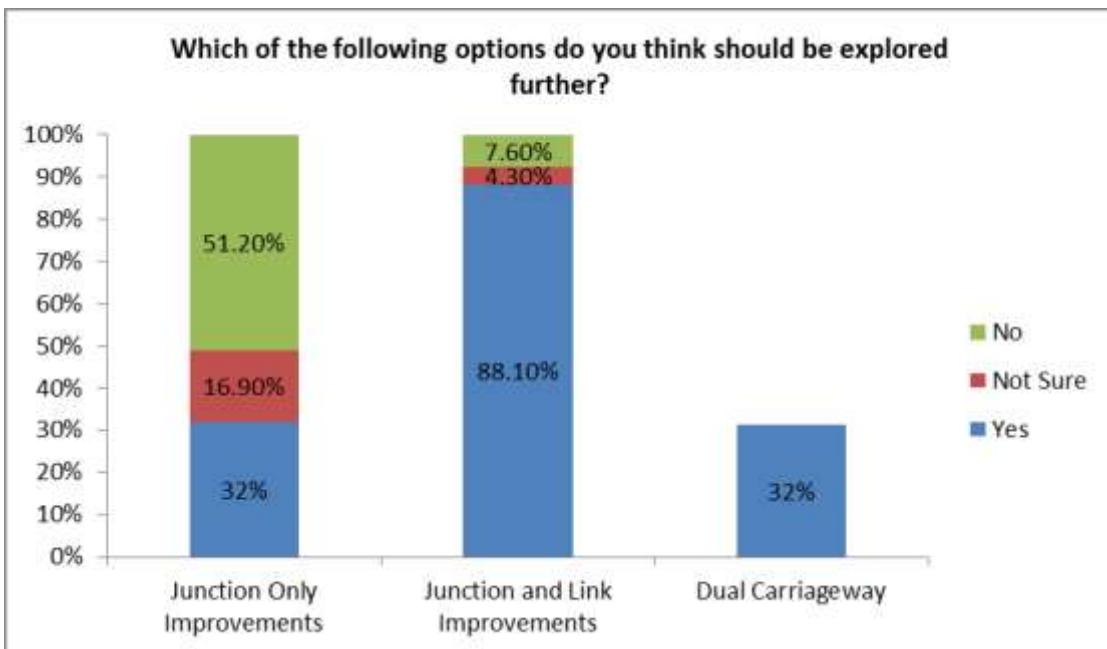
There was a strong support for a scheme in general, with 95% of respondents agreeing the need outlined in the consultation material.

Do you think the following sections identified should be the ones we focus on improving?



The South Molton to Barnstaple section received the strongest support, followed by around Barnstaple and Barnstaple to Bideford.

65% of respondents said that there were other sections that should be included in the proposals. Free text analysis of this question showed that about 51% of all respondents wanted to see the inclusion of the South Molton to Tiverton Section in the proposals. 14% of all respondents said that they would like to see the inclusion of areas beyond Bideford. It is possible that the support for the South Molton to Tiverton and Beyond Bideford sections is underrepresented in these results as more people may have chosen these options if they had been proposed in the multiple choice section.



There was a preference for the Link and Junction Improvements over the Junction only improvements.

Across the whole survey 562 people gave free text answers regarding other options that could be investigated. Of these, 76% highlighted dual carriageway as an option to take forward. This equates to 32% of all survey respondents. 24 other options were put forward, including more traffic enforcement and improvements to public transport; however no other option accounted for more than 2% of all responses.

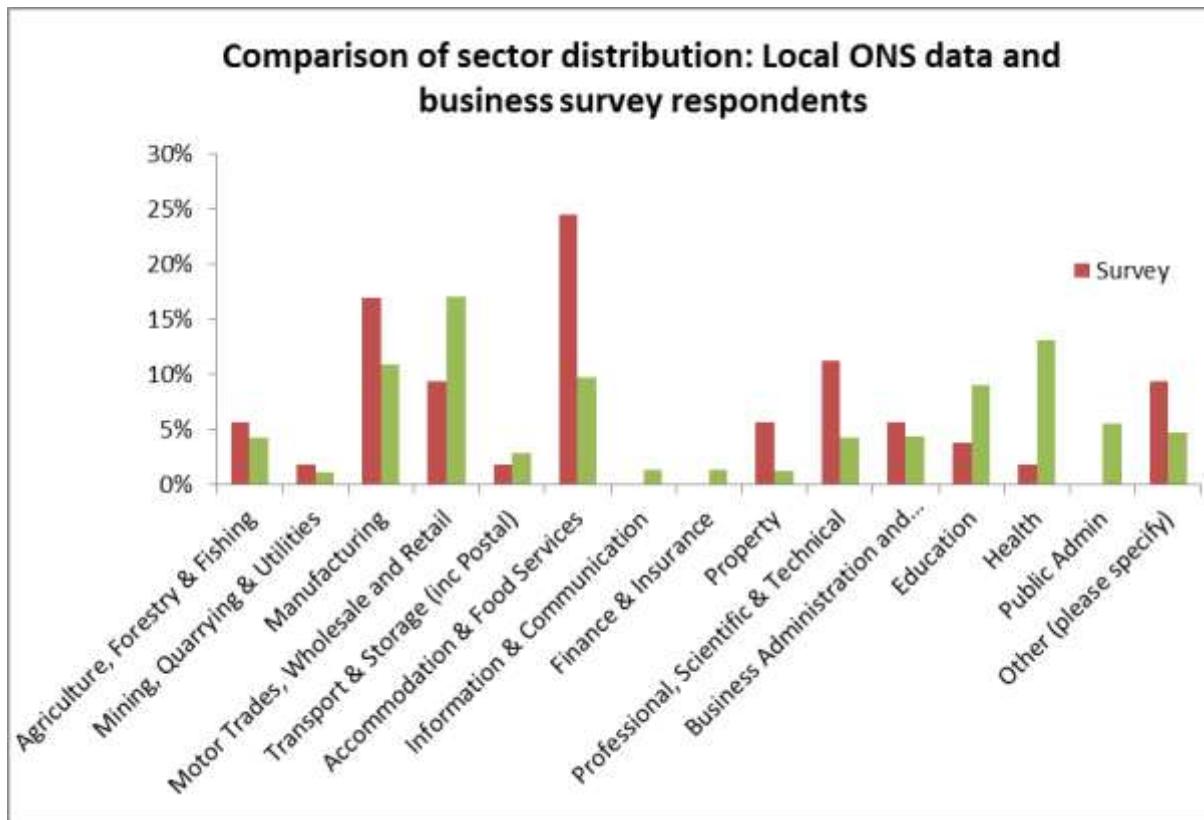
Other Comments:

- Many parish/town councils showed their support for the scheme
- A key concern with the 2+1 option was the safety of the design. Some suggested a central reservation whilst others did not want the 2+1 design used at all. The safety of the current route was also a key concern throughout the free text responses.
- There was a relatively high level of support for improvements at West Buckland Junction (55 respondents put forward the area to be investigated), Landkey junction and Borners Bridge.
- Driver behaviour was highlighted as a key cause of congestion and accidents. Particularly reckless driving and HGVs overtaking each other.

Business Surveys – Preliminary Results Summary

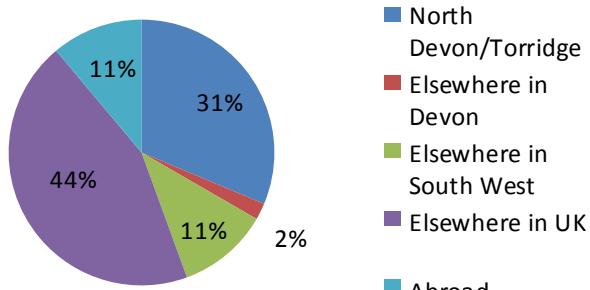
August 2016

58 responses were collected from businesses across Northern Devon using an online survey. Of these, 14 were completed by DCC on behalf of businesses following face to face interviews.

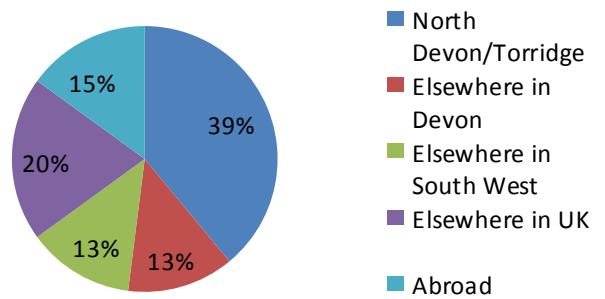


The range of businesses was diverse; with all but 2 of the 18 pre-identified sectors being accounted for in the responses. The 'manufacturing' and 'accommodation and food services' sectors had the highest number of respondents. Although the information & communication and finance & insurance sectors were not represented in the survey responses it is assumed these largely IT based companies would not be as reliant on the link road as other sectors. The annual average turnover of each business ranged from under £100k per annum to over £500m.

Where are the majority of your customers/clients based?



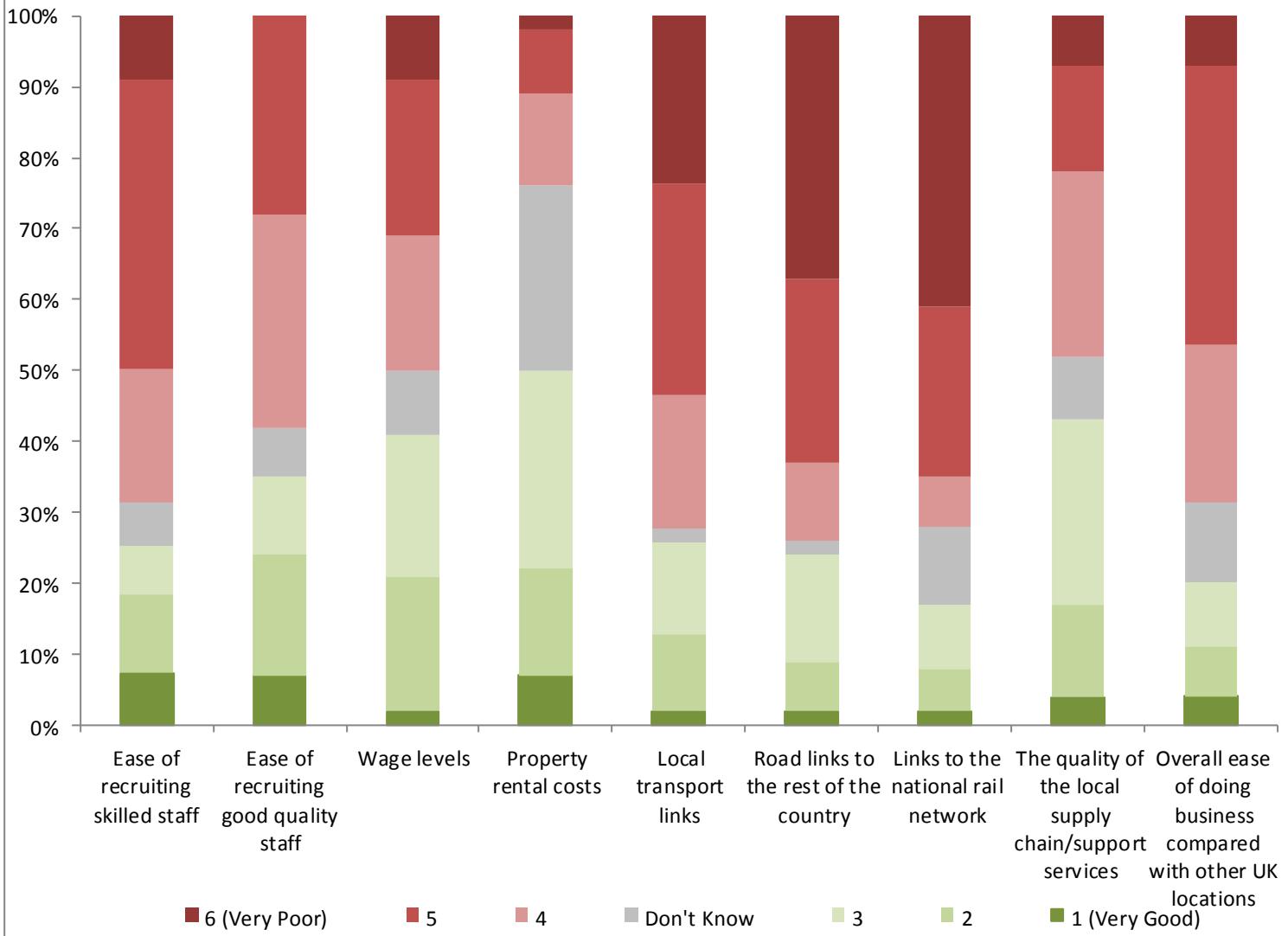
Where are the majority of your suppliers based?



Responses show that businesses tend to serve customers either very locally (31%) or on a national scale (44%). Very few served customers based in locations that were a mid-range distance away such as other parts of the county or the surrounding region.

Although the location of consumers was diverse, 65% of companies sourced their materials from local suppliers based within the South West. Over half of these sourced from local suppliers in North Devon or Torridge.

How do you rate North Devon/Torridge as a business location?

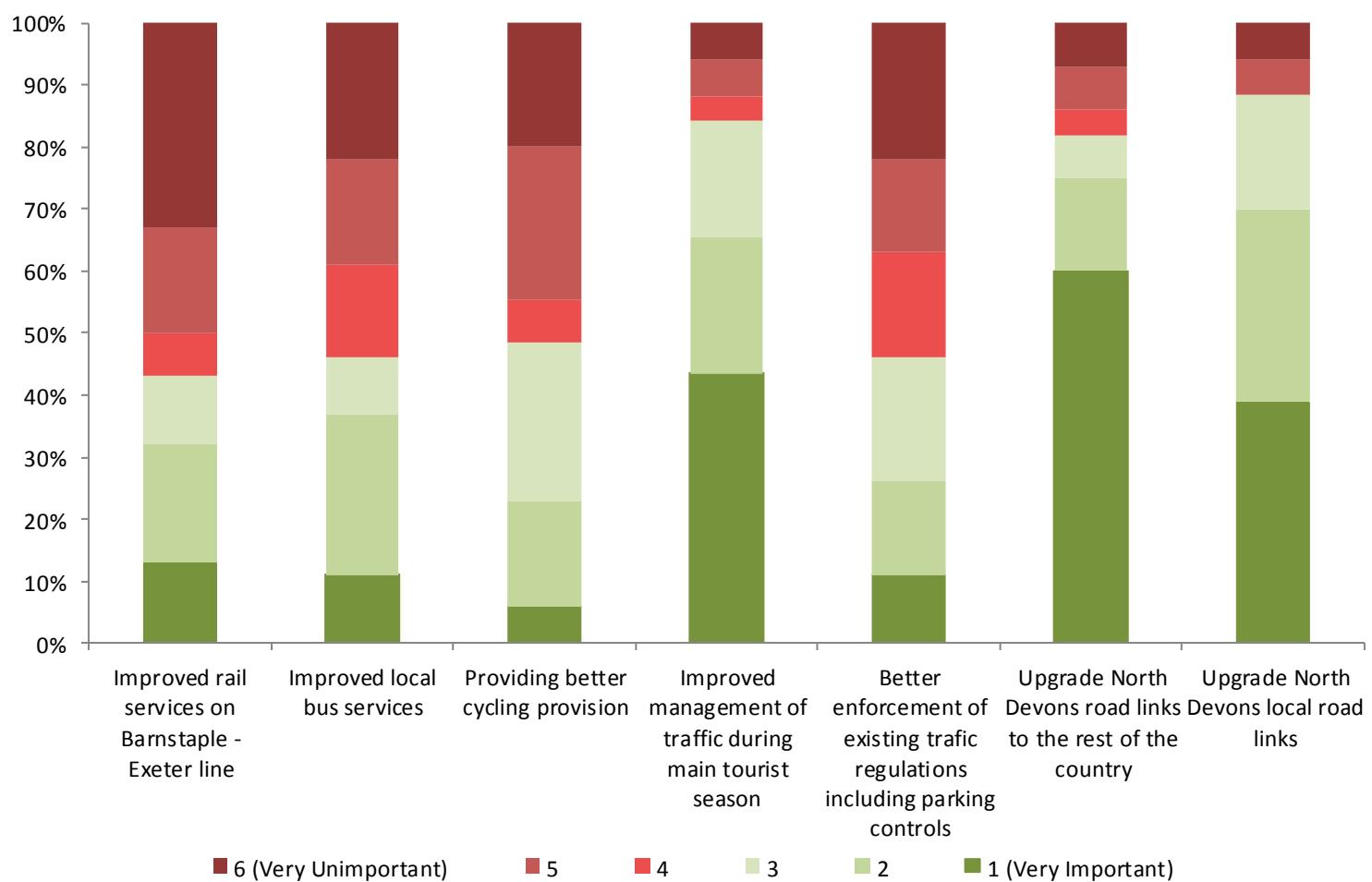


Businesses were asked to rate aspects of doing business in Northern Devon on a scale of 1-6 where 1 was 'very good' and 6 'very poor'. All categories scored an average of more than 3, falling on the 'poor' end of the scale.

Access to the national rail network scored lowest with an average score of 5.14 however when asked to rate the importance of various transport improvements (see below) respondents rated improving the rail line as the least important overall.

Road links also performed poorly when compared to other locations in the UK. Local road links scored an average of 4.43 whilst access to national road links scored 4.7.

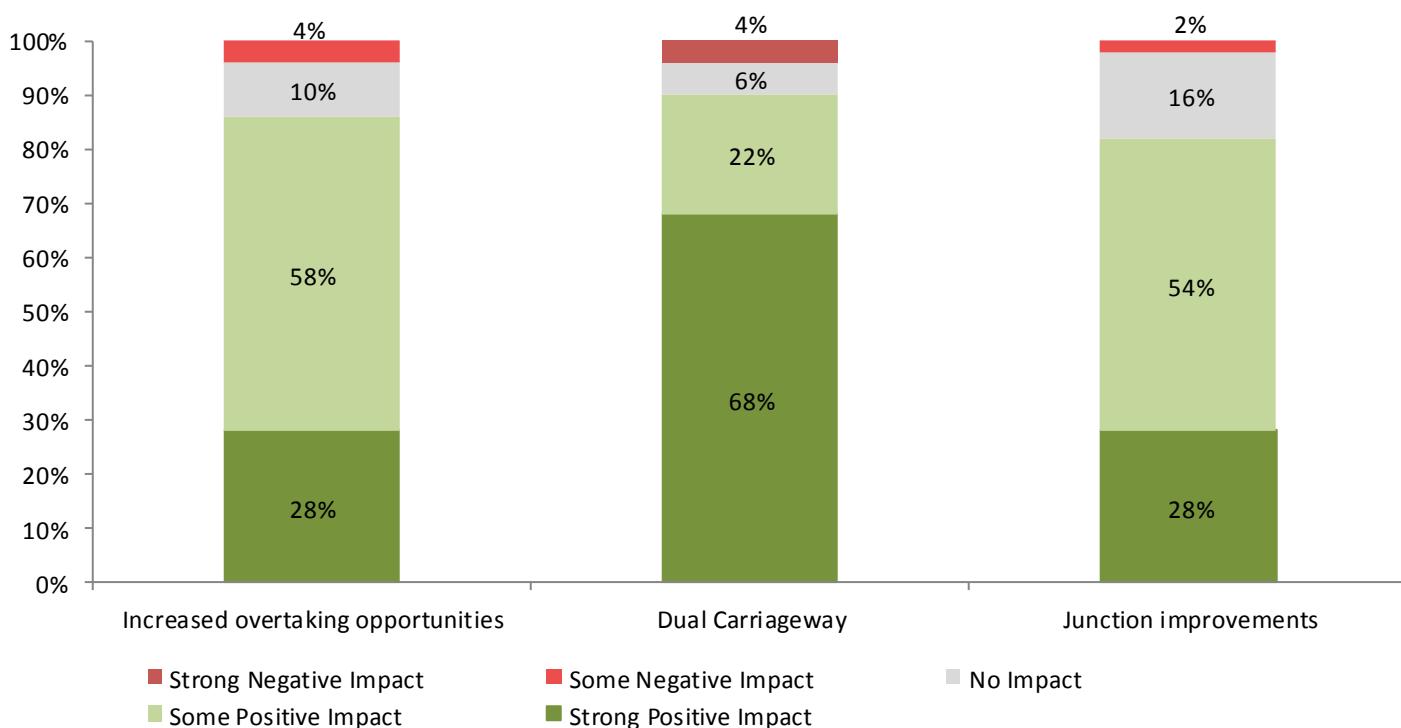
What are the priorities for your business of local transport improvements?



Businesses prioritised road network improvements over public transport improvement. 60% of all respondents rated road network links to the rest of the country as the highest priority for their business. This is reflective of the fact that when asked how important the North Devon Link Road was to their business, 82% of respondents answered that it was 'very important' or 'essential'. Many explained in the free text section that all their goods come in and out of their site using the NDLR.

44% of businesses stated that customer travel was 'majorly disrupted' by the NDLR. When asked about the disruption to deliveries the businesses that had experienced major disruption was comparatively lower at 12%. Staff travel and business travel disruptions caused by the NDLR were rated as 'moderate'

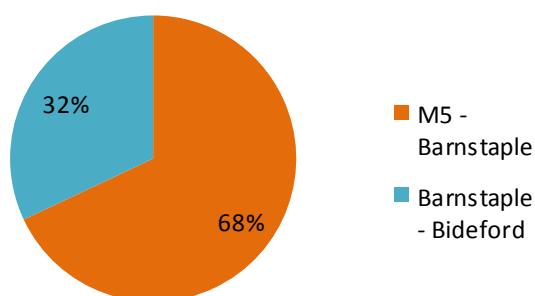
If the North Devon Link Road was improved, what scale of impact could this have on your business?



The implementation of dual carriageway was rated to have a strong positive impact by 68% of businesses, however it also was the only option to be rated to have a strong negative impact (4% of respondents). More overtaking opportunities and junction improvements were both rated to have a strong impact by 28% of business. This reinforces anecdotal evidence that businesses are finding it difficult to access the link road at junctions. As the proportion of HGVs is high for businesses, it is likely that the benefits felt by additional overtaking opportunities are limited due to the 50mph cap on HGV speeds.

Overall, most businesses agreed that any of the improvement options would have at least some positive impact for their business. 68% of businesses said that they would prioritise the M5 - Barnstaple section for improvements over the Barnstaple – Bideford section.

If one section was to be improved, which would you prioritise?



41% of businesses said that if improvements to the NDLR were made then their turnover would increase.