Appendix B2.1 – Strategic Context
A350 Farmers Roundabout

Strategic Context

Overview

The A350 is the main north-south route on the western side of the county and is an important transport link for the west Wiltshire towns and the local economy. Journey time reliability is important, especially for freight movements and to attract and retain employers and businesses in the area.

The adequacy of connections between the south coast (the port of Poole in particular) and M4, and onwards to Bristol and the Midlands has been increasingly compromised. In essence, there is a lack of suitable north-south links in the strategic network covering large parts of the south west of England formed by a ‘box’ bounded by the M5 to the west, A34 to the east, M4 to the North, and the A31, A35 and Dorset coast to the south. Within this area, north-south connections are made either by the A36/A46(T) through Bath, or the A350 and A338 primary routes. However, these routes experience considerable congestion and road safety problems, and their increasing unreliability is significantly constraining development and business growth across the region, including plans to grow the port of Poole.

Furthermore, over time the focus for business and housing development in the area has shifted towards the western Wiltshire towns and away from the highly sensitive environments
of Bath and the Cotswolds / Mendips Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The ‘Growth Corridor’ in this area is therefore along the A350, rather than the A36/A46(T).

**A350 Growth Corridor**

There are aspirations to improve the A350 corridor as the primary route connects the main settlements of the Swindon and Wiltshire Local Enterprise Partnership’s (SWLEP) A350 Growth Zone (Chippenham, Corsham, Melksham, Trowbridge, Warminster and Westbury) with the M4, A303 and the south coast ports. It is critical for the businesses located within the A350 Growth Zone that reliable connectivity is provided as a means of getting goods to the market more cost effectively, and also for increasing the pool of available labour. The corridor also has important links with the West of England Partnership area.

Between 2012 and 2014, the number of employees in the area grew by 12%, compared to a 7% growth for the SWLEP area as a whole, and 5% across Great Britain. The A350 Growth Zone is home to 8200 businesses. A net growth of 745 business was experienced between 2010 and 2015, an increase of 10%.

Core Policy 66 ‘Strategic Transport Network’ of the Wiltshire Core Strategy (adopted January 2015) states that:

“In particular, the strategic transport network along the A350 corridor will be maintained, managed and selectively improved to support development growth at Chippenham, Melksham, Trowbridge, Westbury and Warminster.”

Improving the efficiency, reliability and resilience of the A350 through western Wiltshire is seen as critical by SWLEP to unlocking and enabling continued growth. Their January 2016 Strategic Economic Plan prioritises the need for:

“Key road junction and infrastructure improvements to support economic and planned development growth.”

The Plan specifically identifies an “A350 Growth Zone” wherein priority is explicitly given to:

“Investing in the A350 primary route through western Wiltshire to ensure it can fulfil its north-south strategic function and support significant economic and development growth.”
Some of the planned and delivered improvement schemes along the A350 route are indicated in the diagram below.
Several sections on the A350 primary route carry high volumes of traffic and HGV movements. There are quite a few pinch points along this route, some of which are already being addressed, particularly around Chippenham, but further selective improvement is required at Melksham at Farmers Roundabout. The strategic role of the route is undermined due to the detrimental impact on journey time reliability, and its susceptibility to incidents. The whole A350 primary route needs to be improved in order to support the economic and development growth of the corridor.

Farmer Roundabout

At peak periods the roundabout experiences particularly high volumes of traffic, and consequent queues and delays.
The proposed scheme consists of capacity and safety improvements at the A350 Farmers Roundabout junction with the B3107 and A3102.

Traffic signals at the A350/A365 will be linked to those at Asda and at Farmers Roundabout.

Existing traffic signals at Asda entrance will be linked to the A365 and roundabout signals.

New traffic signals will be installed at Farmers Roundabout and road markings changed to reduce delays and improve safety.
The scheme involves alterations to the roundabout, and the introduction of traffic signals to improve safety and increase capacity. As part of the scheme, the traffic lanes at the entries to the roundabout and the circulatory carriageway will be altered. The adjacent A350/A365 junction and the traffic signals at Asda will be linked to improve capacity at the junctions. The scheme will also include carriageway resurfacing from Farmers Roundabout to A365 Bath Road. Additionally, extending merge/flare at Semington Roundabout is also part of the overall scheme.

The objectives of the proposed scheme are to:

- Improve connectivity between Melksham, the west Wiltshire towns and the A36/M4;
- Reduce queue lengths and delays, improving journey time reliability on the A350 at Melksham;
- Facilitate housing and employment growth along the A350 corridor and encourage inward investment by addressing known and forecast congestion pinch-points; and
- Protect the strategic role of the A350, minimising the potential for traffic reassignment away from the corridor.