



Transport & Infrastructure Committee

4 November 2024

Title:	Economic Impact Assessment for Peat Soil Affected Roads
Report of:	Anna Graham, Transport Programme Manager
Lead Member:	Cllr Anna Smith, Lead Member for Transport
Public Report:	Yes
Key Decision:	No
Voting Arrangements:	A No vote required

Recommendations:

A	Note the draft scope for the Economic Impact Assessment for Peat Soil Affected Roads and Members are invited to provide feedback.
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Strategic Objective(s):

The proposals within this report fit under the following strategic objective(s):

	Achieving ambitious skills and employment opportunities
x	Achieving good growth <ul style="list-style-type: none">The economic impact assessment for peat soil affected roads seeks to evaluate the implications of maintaining, managing, and renewing the network whilst understanding the effects of businesses reliant on the routes
	Increased connectivity
x	Enabling resilient communities <ul style="list-style-type: none">The economic impact assessment will provide the Combined Authority with a strategic approach to a road network affected by climate change. Supporting and enabling our Highway Authorities to adapt to these environmental changes and maintaining connectivity for our communities.
	Achieving best value and high performance

1. Purpose

1.1	This paper provides members of the Transport and Infrastructure Committee the opportunity to review the scope of the Economic Impact Assessment for Peat Soil Affected Roads and provide feedback.
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2. Proposal

2.1	<p>The Fens are an area of immense agricultural significance, often referred to as the "breadbasket of Britain" due to their role in producing one-fifth of the nation's crops and a third of its vegetables. This fertile landscape is not only a cornerstone of the UK's food supply but also a vital contributor to the economy. However, this area is also among the most vulnerable in the UK to the impacts of climate change, facing increasing threats from flooding, drought, and severe weather events. The dual importance of the Fens – both as a hub of agricultural production and as a region at high risk from climate shifts – underscores the urgent need for proactive and sustainable solutions to protect its future.</p> <p>Therefore, the Combined Authority in its role as the Strategic Transport Authority for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough is supporting the Highway Authorities by progressing an Economic Impact Assessment for Peat Soil Affected Roads.</p> <p>The key objectives are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• To evaluate the economic implications of maintaining, repairing, and upgrading roads that traverse peat soil areas to ensure sustainable and cost-effective transportation infrastructure.• To evaluate the economic impact of a declining peat soil affected road network, relative to the maintenance budgets available on the businesses which are reliant on these routes.• Outline a strategic approach for the Combined Authority area for managing peat soil affected roads and approach against a backdrop of climate change.• Ensure close working with the Fen Road trial that is exploring different road maintenance and renewal methodologies. The Fen Roads Trial will play a key role in informing the economic impact assessment by offering valuable insights into the anticipated costs of future road maintenance and repair.
2.2	<p>The draft scope is available for review in Appendix A. The scope has been drafted in collaboration with both Cambridgeshire County Council and Peterborough City Council.</p>
2.3	<p>Initial discussions with Lincolnshire County Council highlighted their progress in investigating the impacts of climate change on Fenland soils and particularly identifying peat soil compression as a key issue. Further collaboration with Lincolnshire County Council will be undertaken to maximise knowledge sharing.</p>

3. Background

3.1	<p>In January 2024, the Medium-Term Financial Plan was approved by the Combined Authority Board which included funding for the development of the Local Transport and Connectivity Plan sub strategies. Later, in March 2024 the TIC were invited to note and recommend for approval to the board the drawdown of funding to undertake the development of the listed sub strategies, including for peat soil affected roads – economic impact.</p>
3.2	<p>Separate to the economic impact assessment the Climate Programme Funds were also approved at the January 2024 Combined Authority Board. This included funding for the delivery of the Climate Action Plan and Local Nature Recovery Strategy, as well as a capital project for developing innovative ways to support infrastructure being affected by climate change (e.g. the Fen roads).</p>
3.3	<p>The Fen Roads Trial seeks to test innovative solutions to address the continuing maintenance and safety problems related to roads constructed over peat soil deposits which will inform future investment in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough areas as well across the wider fens landscape region into Norfolk and Lincolnshire.</p> <p>The Combined Authority's Single Assurance Framework (SAF) is being used to drawdown the funding for the trial. The Concept Paper outlining the proposed trial has been recently approved by the Investment Panel and the SAF Business Case is being prepared.</p>
3.4	<p>The economic impact of peat soil affected roads, and the Fen Roads Trial are being managed together within the Combined Authority to maximise the alignment between the two work streams. Appendix B contains the Concept Paper for the Fen Roads.</p>

4. Appendices

4.1	<i>Appendix A – Draft Scope for the Economic Impact of Peat Soil Affected Roads</i>
4.2	<i>Appendix B- Concept Paper for Fen Roads Trial</i>

5. Implications

Financial Implications

5.1	Funding the LTCP sub strategies, including the economic impact assessment is within the existing MTFP.
5.2	Climate Programme Funds which include funding for the Fen Roads Trial is within the existing MTFP.

Legal Implications

6.1	It is proposed that a consultancy will be procured for the Economic Impact Assessment for Peat Soil Affected Roads work through the ESPO framework and subsequently, the Combined Authority would enter into a contract with the successful third-party consultancy.
6.2	The Fens Road Trial will be project managed by Cambridgeshire County Council and once the SAF process is complete a Grant Funding Agreement will be required between the Combined Authority and Cambridgeshire County Council.

Public Health Implications

7.1	None known at this time
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Environmental & Climate Change Implications

8.1	The changing climate is impacting the way the road network is managed and maintained. Both the Economic Impact Assessment and the Fen Road Trial seeks to understand the full implications and provide new approaches.
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Other Significant Implications

9.1	N/A
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Background Papers

10.1	N/A
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