

# News release

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## Business leaders back bypass bid

Business leaders are backing Herefordshire Council's bid to build an outer distributor road for Hereford. A second river crossing and bypass is 'one of the highest priorities for planners' said the West Midlands Business Council (WMBC).

West Midlands' local government leaders are also supporting the council's £60-million bid for priority status for the new road, which could signal an end to the city's current level of traffic congestion.

Massive transport improvements are needed across Herefordshire and Worcestershire if tens of thousands of new homes are to be built as part of the government-backed regional spatial strategy. Up to 8000 new houses could be built in Hereford as the housing market recovers, providing more funding to support the outer distributor road and a new river bridge.

The WMBC has called for "a fundamental review of transport requirements" and says that improving transport links in and around the two counties should be one of the highest priorities for planners if the house-building scheme is approved. Business leaders stress that new river crossings are of key strategic importance, both across the Severn in Worcestershire and the Wye in Hereford.

The WMBC also said rail investment needs to improve, and that routes from Herefordshire via Worcester to London are currently hampered by the lack of dual tracking via Worcester and Evesham – as well as at Oxford, and this restricts the ability to expand rail services on this route.

The planning inquiry into the house-building plans for the whole region is due to begin on Tuesday 28 April, at the Molineux stadium in Wolverhampton. It will run until the end of June and will consider whether 400,000 new homes should be built across the West Midlands over the next 20 years. A government-appointed planning inspector will listen to the submissions of all interested parties, before compiling a report for the government to make its final decision.

The government is also considering Herefordshire's initiative for a city outer distributor road, and money could be available by 2013, allowing time for planning applications and inquiries to run their course. The direction of the new road is yet to be determined but could be completed by 2018.

Hereford's place in the overall transport plan – prepared jointly by regional development agency Advantage West Midlands (AWM) and the West Midlands Regional Assembly (WMRA) – as a “settlement of significant development” supports the case for a new river crossing and an outer distributor road.

“The case for Hereford's new road and river crossing is a strong one and a priority for the council, for residents of the city and for local businesses”, said Councillor Roger Phillips, leader of Herefordshire Council. “Road congestion is a daily bugbear for commuters and has cost implications for business. The fact that the council has won strong support at regional level is a great cause for optimism”.

The government has awarded £2 million for Herefordshire to continue its progress in meeting the growth required for the county. The money will go towards the cost of developing park and ride services and to prepare studies on the proposed outer distributor road, as well as finalise the new local development framework for Herefordshire.

“The council is committed to ensuring new growth is sustainable”, added Councillor Phillips, “and as well as providing the right infrastructure for business to thrive, we want to support and protect the historic core and environment of Hereford”.

## **Ends**

For information please call the communications unit on 01432 260006