

The South East Manchester Multi Modal Study (SEMMMS) roads

Background briefing

Although an A6 Stockport Bypass was first mooted many decades ago - and various routes were considered - the network of roads that make up what is now known as the SEMMMS Relief Roads appeared in roughly their present form as separate trunk road schemes in the 1989 White Paper *'Roads for Prosperity'*. Work began on all of them but, in the late 1990s, they were remitted to a multi-modal study which became known as SEMMMS. SEMMMS stands for **South East Manchester Multi Modal Study**. The roads remitted were:

- A6 Stockport North-South Bypass (including the Stepping Hill Link Road)
- A555 Manchester Airport Eastern Link Road (MAELR)
- A555 Manchester Airport Western Link Road (MAWLR)
- A523 Poynton Bypass and
- A523 Poynton to Macclesfield Improvement

The study final report was published in 2001. It recommended that all except the last of the above should go ahead, albeit at a lower standard than they were remitted, and a package of other measures should be introduced as well. (These included a three times an hour Macclesfield–Manchester train service which, it was argued, would remove a lot of car journeys between the high car owning areas of North East Cheshire and South East Manchester and the city centre. However, that recommendation was never implemented).

The A6 Stockport Bypass was remitted at motorway standard but the study advised it should be a high quality grade separated dual carriageway. All the other roads were remitted as grade separated dual carriageways but the recommendation was that the Manchester Airport Link Roads and the Poynton Bypass should be built to 'at grade' standard. The case was not proven for the Poynton to Macclesfield Improvement and therefore, whilst there are protected routes shown on Local Plans for the other roads, there is no 'saved' route for this one.

All the proposed roads were de-trunked. They became the responsibility of the three local authorities they pass through. Stockport Borough Council has taken the lead role on behalf of the other two. Originally these comprised Cheshire County Council and Manchester City Council but Cheshire has since been divided into two new Unitary Authorities. The one concerned here is Cheshire East Council (CEC).

In 2004 a major scheme business case was submitted for all the remaining SEMMMS roads but it is understood the government were unhappy with the traffic modelling. Lobbying, primarily by Stockport B.C., its MPs and Manchester Airport, continued and - towards the end of the last government - Geoff Hoon as Transport Secretary - announced that the government was prepared to fund half (£165m) of the estimated cost of a section of the SEMMMS roads which ran between the A6 at Hazel Grove and Manchester Airport. This comprised the two airport link roads and the northern part of the Poynton Bypass – if the local authorities would find the remainder.

No SEMMMS roads were mentioned in the Coalition Government's Comprehensive Spending Review of 2010, not even as longer term projects, and therefore the previous funding offer was withdrawn. But, in March 2011, the Chancellor, George Osborne, declared (without any consultation) that an Enterprise Zone was to be created at Manchester Airport. This was despite the North West Regional Spatial Strategy panel report specifically advising that the airport should not become a commercial hub in its own right. Apart from it being mainly surrounded by Green Belt, the panel said an airport commercial hub would detract economically from Manchester city centre and from surrounding towns. The action by the Chancellor prompted the airport to unveil a plan it had been working on for an 'Airport City'. This has subsequently been tagged as phase one of the Enterprise Zone. The declaration of the Enterprise Zone appears to be the main 'driver' behind the Chancellor subsequently repeating the previous funding offer made by Geoff Hoon in respect of the A6 to Manchester Airport section of SEMMMS.

In the time that has elapsed since the first government funding offer, the Greater Manchester Combined Authority has been established with Transport for Greater Manchester (TfGM) as a composite part. There is now a £1.2bn. Greater Manchester Transport Fund programme agreed which intends to utilise a new 'Earn Back' funding model. This will make up most of the difference for the A6-Manchester Airport scheme. However, the Earn Back model has no pedigree and appears to be based on an assumption there will be long term economic growth.

The Cabinets of the three promoting local authorities all approved the progress of the scheme based on the summary case and a consultation opened on the A6 to Manchester Airport Road on October 22nd 2012 with a closing date of January 25th 2013. The full Business Case, (according to the SEMMMS website) was not presented to the Department for Transport until November 13th 2012 and was not displayed on the SEMMMS website until later that week – nearly four weeks after the consultation opened. It is also worth noting that the September 2012 Cheshire East Council Cabinet meeting approved the spending of just under £1m. for initial work on the Poynton Bypass which would connect to the A6 to Manchester Airport Relief Road. It has been established that the full extent of the route to be investigated will include the former Poynton-Macclesfield Improvement and it would therefore extend as far south as the northern end of the Macclesfield Silk Road.

Major issues are going to be the soundness of the business case, the funding mechanism and the traffic model; impacts on the Air Quality Management Areas around the airport and the A6 and impacts on the Green Belt.