

B&MK

WATERWAY 2010

Executive Summary of B&MK Stage One Feasibility Report

In May 2001 British Waterways backed by a group of public and private partners¹ commissioned Halcrow² to carry out an initial study into the feasibility of building a brand new 21st century waterway between Bedford and Milton Keynes -B&MK. The purpose of the study was to establish the viability of the new broad waterway and determine its most promising routes.

The study found that the proposed new waterway could provide social, economic and environmental benefits across the region, attracting up to 1.5million visitors, creating up to 530 permanent jobs, 440 temporary construction jobs and bringing an extra £7million into the local economy each year.

Nine route options were identified with construction costs estimated at between £80 and £150million and the report concludes that with the necessary support and integrated master-planning, the waterway could be built by 2010.

Scope of study

British Waterways and its partners asked that the study focus on:

- Identifying opportunities in the study area related to the environment, education, tourism, recreation, job creation, economic development and commercial opportunities;
- Consents and legislation that might be required to implement the scheme;
- Impact of the scheme on the landscape, built environment, bio-diversity, archaeology, land drainage and flood alleviation;
- Construction and operational costs of route options;
- Availability of water for the waterway and its impact;
- Obstructions to navigation in the River Great Ouse through Bedford and how they could be overcome;
- Outlining funding options for the scheme.

Benefits

The study found that the proposed new waterway corridor will provide a significant boost to tourism.

Visitor expenditure	£7.4million to £8.5million
Direct employment	460 to 530
Commercial employment	Up to 6,500
Construction jobs	280 to 440
Canal users	91,000 per annum
Informal visitors	1.2 to 1.5million per annum

¹ The feasibility study was funded by a partnership between British Waterways, The Bedford & Milton Keynes Waterway Trust, The East of England Development Agency (EEDA), Bedford Borough Council, Bedfordshire County Council, Buckinghamshire County Council, Mid Bedfordshire District Council, Bedfordia plc, the Environment Agency, The Inland Waterways Association (IWA), the Great Ouse Boating Association and The Waterways Trust.

² Halcrow Group Ltd is an independent consultancy that provides infrastructure-based business solutions and specialises in the water, transport, and property sectors.

The higher figures on both the visitor expenditure and number of informal visitors reflect the extra boost from the creation of a high profile visitor attraction like the Falkirk Wheel boat lift currently being constructed in Scotland³.

Identified routes

Nine route options were identified and evaluated, taking into account:

- Engineering considerations;
- Planning and environmental designations;
- Opportunities for integrating the waterway with existing environmental, landscape and visitor attractions, including lakes;
- Sites for special attractions;
- Location of opportunities that might contribute capital funding towards the scheme.

The routes (see attached map) are made up of a combination of two reaches, one from the Grand Union Canal at Milton Keynes, the other from the River Great Ouse at Bedford, meeting near Brogborough Hill.

Technical issues

The dimensions of the new waterway have been based on the dimensions of a broad canal, providing a channel 9m wide and 1.5m deep, with an air draught of 5m width by 3m height. Depending on the route selected, the waterway will require between 19 and 26 locks. The locks will be 4.34m wide by 30m long, with a cill depth of 1.7m and an average depth of 2.45m.

The waterway will have to cross rivers, roads, railways, footpaths, bridleways and land drains. Structures may include an aqueduct over the River Ouzel and a tunnel beneath the M1. If the route entering the River Ouse upstream of Bedford's town centre is selected there will be significant navigational problems to overcome. Costs have been assessed for de-silting and making adjustments to structures on the Ouse through Bedford. The issue of water supply for the entire waterway has also been examined.

Costs

Construction costs for each of the nine routes have been estimated separately and range from £80 to £150million. As it is a desk study the engineering estimates have been undertaken using broad unit costs (e.g. cost/km of canal). The figures below include a five per cent contingency on base estimates and are rounded up to the nearest £5million.

	A	B	C
1	£150m	£150m	£145m
2	£85m	£85m	£80m
3	£90m	£90m	£90m

Funding

Funding for the project will be achieved through a partnership seeking funds from a wide range of public, private and voluntary sector sources. The main sources of funding are expected to be from the private sector. These may include Landfill Tax Credits, surface water drainage charges and Section 106⁴ contributions, as well as sharing development uplift. Water supply via BW's planned Water Grid initiative⁵ and income from its telecommunications partnerships⁶ could also help fund the project. Public money is also available from a variety of sources and public sector partners should include British Waterways, the Bedford & Milton Keynes Waterway Trust, The Waterways Trust, the Environment Agency, the Internal Drainage Board, local authorities, and

³ The revolutionary wheel will replace a flight of locks closed in the 1930's and is the showpiece of the £80million project to reconnect the Forth & Clyde and Union canals between Glasgow and Edinburgh.

⁴ Section 106 of the Planning Act allows planning authorities to require certain obligations of a development before they will grant planning consent. These may remedy planning problems and enhance the quality of development. In all cases, these must be fair and reasonable and there must be a clear planning justification for doing so.

⁵ BW plans to develop its network to carry water from areas of surplus to areas of demand. With its consultants, and backed by the Government, BW is selecting a major partner to take this project forward.

⁶ Through its partnership with Easynet, BW already has over 500 miles of fibreoptic cables under its towpaths, providing income to reinvest in the waterway system.

the Regional Development Agencies The waterway could form part of urban and rural regeneration initiatives, as well as environmental and transport schemes.

Private funds could be raised through partnership with developers and the waterway could become an integral part of the developments, either as an amenity, drainage assistant or other mutually beneficial function, for example transport or water supply. Finance towards the waterway's construction and operation could be generated as part of the planning strategy.

The way forward

Through widespread consultation, a preferred route from the nine options should be selected and then the course of this route refined.

The overall project should be managed and delivered through a Strategic Master Plan. The legislative process and Transport Works Act Order⁷, the business case, funding partnerships, procurement of the Stage Two Feasibility Study, design and construction, along with continued consultation to generate momentum and support, will all need to be maintained and developed together.

Conclusion

The Bedford to Milton Keynes link is a 21st century waterway that can unite the environment and tourism with enterprise and amenity attractions. The waterway can use both traditional and modern approaches to deliver an exciting vision that will stand the test of time. These characteristics echo the desire of the Government to promote inland waterways⁸, encouraging a modern, integrated and sustainable approach to their use and recognition that waterways are catalysts for regeneration and sustainable development.

The findings of the first stage study demonstrate the potential viability of the B&MK project. The precise route optimisation and development opportunities can only be resolved through consultation and more detailed assessment in partnership with all stakeholders.

⁷ The Transport & Works Act (TWA) '92 introduced a new procedure for authorising transport projects that previously required statutory approval under private Bill procedure. Known as a Transport & Works Act Order, the process allows the Secretary of State to grant planning permission and authorise compulsory purchase. An application is supported by an environmental statement and a public local inquiry held if there are objections.

⁸ *Waterways for Tomorrow*, published June 2000