

## Proposals for Streamlining Midlands Region Highway Alliances

### Introduction

Historically a number of alliances or groups have operated within the Midlands Region with the aim of sharing knowledge, expertise and resource between the various Highway Authorities. At the MHA's 2015 annual event Simon Pinkney of NHT stated that there were 43 'efficiency organisations' operating over the 9 regions of England, an average of just under 5 a region. This seems excessive, and not a good example of efficient collaborative working. That is not to say however that these organisations are not efficient or that they do not delivery value for money, but with ever decreasing resources in terms of financial input and officer resource within Highway Authorities there is a need to consider streamlining these to encourage greater participation and drive greater value.

In the Midlands there are three main organisations: - the Midlands Highway Alliance (MHA), the Midlands Service Improvement Group (MSIG), and the West Midlands Highway Alliance (WMHA). Each organisation has its own support structure. Each organisation has its own membership and there is significant overlap between memberships, with some authorities being active members of all three.

It is recognised that there is not much in the way of duplication of effort in having the three organisations, but there would be better sharing of good practice and aggregation of benefits if they were all linked in some form of efficiency partnership.

Each authority will have joined an alliance based on what it perceives it will get out of it and this will no doubt differ by authority and by alliance. Each alliance has a slightly different offer and moving forward any proposal will need to ensure any future model retains both the current membership of each alliance and the same deliverables/benefits.

Whilst each alliance differs in their 'offer', all three are very much focussed on operational delivery either through sharing of knowledge, contracts and procurement or performance and benchmarking. Other bodies operate regionally and nationally to influence the national agenda (ADEPT, UKRLG, HAMFIG) through DfT and whilst the same authorities or individuals may sit on various groups, the link between the national agenda and operational delivery seems disjointed at present. In any new model there is a real opportunity to act as co-ordinated voice for working with and lobbying Government to ensure the needs of the Midlands is met whilst not losing focus on the more detailed operational matters and ensuring that these elements are aligned and joined up.



### Midlands Highway Alliance

MHA was formed in 2007, with the support of the Innovation and Efficiency Partnership, and initially had 11 members. Its aim is to help highway authorities improve services and deliver efficiency savings. Its membership has grown to its current 21 plus Highways England. It has 5 work streams that mostly look at ways that collaborative procurement can bring about efficiencies, particularly through frameworks for construction and professional services. It is managed by an Executive Board, to give strategic direction, and a Programme Board, which gives a technical overview of the work of the groups.

## Midlands Service Improvements Group

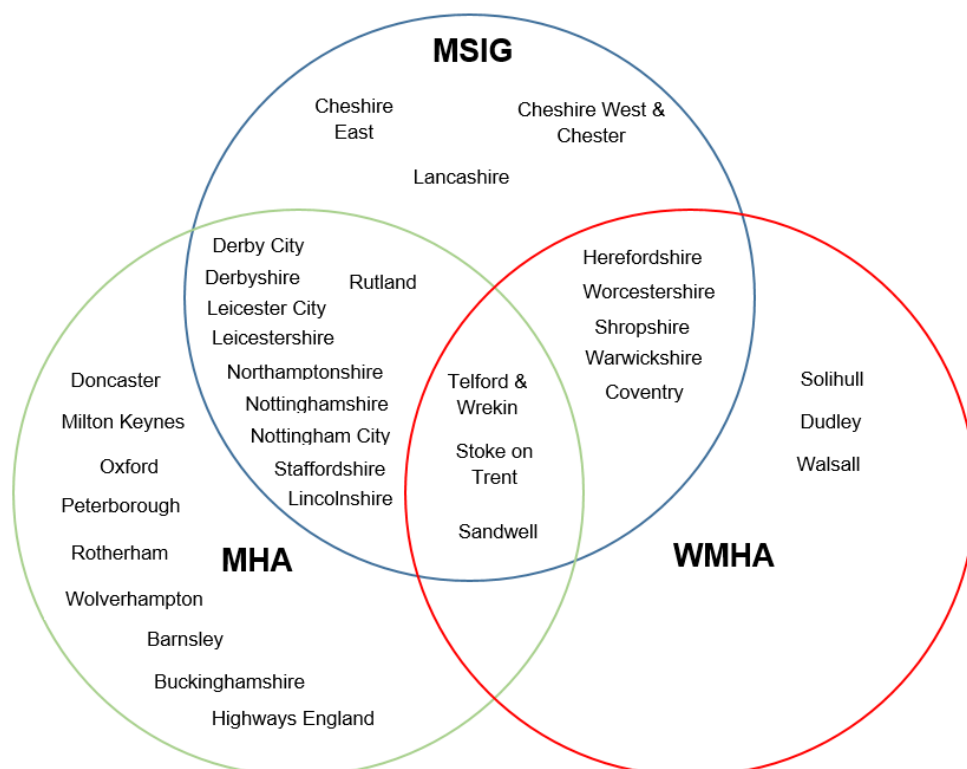
MSIG was formed in 1997 as the Midlands Regional Best value Group, to deal with matters concerning Best Value and Performance Management, initially with 13 members. It became MSIG in 2003, the new name better reflecting the purpose of the group, which is to act as a beacon of good practice and service improvement. Its membership has grown to its current 21. It has 15 task groups that meet to look at and discuss specific areas of highway and transportation provision. These are managed by a steering group lead by Mike Ashworth, of Derbyshire County Council.

## West Midlands Highway Alliance

The West Midlands Highway Alliance (WMHA) was established as an unincorporated, local authority led body originally consisting of 14 local authorities which was created to orchestrate and oversee a programme which would accelerate the achievement of value and efficiencies within the region. Out of this a need for professional services framework was identified and two framework contracts were lets; WMHA Term Service Professional Services Contract (Worcestershire & Telford & Wrekin) and the WMHA Professional Services Framework (Solihull, Warwickshire, Coventry). In recent years the WMHA has tried to revitalise itself and currently has XX local authorities. The WMHA at present operates on a more informal basis than MHA/MSIG but also offers a much lower membership fee.

## Current Memberships

Currently the membership of the three organisations is much wider than just the Midlands area which shows the strength and confidence of the alliances/organisations in this region with local authorities willing to travel significant distances to contribute to these groups. Under the possible changes there are no proposals to lose any current members or limit membership to just the Midlands region. The diagram below shows which authorities are membership of which organisations and where there are overlaps.



## **Gap Analysis**

In reviewing current membership, the following Midlands based Highway Authorities have been identified as not being part of any alliance or organisation.

- Birmingham

In addition other organisations may wish to participate or as a minimum ensure there is some joined up discussion between these organisations:

- Highways England
- Midlands Connect
- Transport for the West Midlands

## **Summary**

It is clear that there are a number of strong collaborative organisations/alliances in the Midlands region which is evidence by the wider involvement from other authorities outside of the region such as Lancashire, Chester/Cheshire, and Oxfordshire etc. A lot of excellent work has been delivered by these organisations including performance and benchmarking, knowledge sharing and joint procurement. However with reducing resources in Local Government there is a need to consider whether these organisations could be better aligned in order to maximise the efficiencies recognised by each authority and provide a strong presence in the Midlands Region for work with National bodies and DfT whilst improving the delivery of Highways and Transport on the ground. This would provide the Midlands an opportunity to cement its place as the leader of collaboration across Highways Authorities in the UK.