

From: Reading Friends of the Earth

To: Councillor Page, SEPT Committee, Cris Butler, Chris Maddocks, Emma Baker, James Turner, Ben Burfoot

Date: 4th February 2019

Pre-Consultation Comments.

NEW LOCAL TRANSPORT PLAN AND BOROUGH-WIDE CAR PARKING & AIR QUALITY STRATEGY

Vision:

Reading Friends of the Earth welcome the Council's vision expressed in paragraph 4.2 of the document Item 12 of Reading Policy Committee on 16th July 2018:

- "Our ambitious LTP4 vision will seek to support healthy lifestyle choices, improve quality of life and facilitate economic growth by reducing congestion, improving air quality and promoting sustainable transport options for local journeys or as part of longer journeys."

Our reservations are that:

- While 'promoting sustainable transport options for local journeys or as part of longer journeys' is welcome it does not include a commitment to achieve substantial reductions in climate-changing emissions from transport.
- Rather than broad-brush GVA economic growth the economic aim should be to provide sustainable prosperity and welfare for every level of society.

We hope Reading will achieve its vision and be recognised as a champion of a new approach to reduce pollution and congestion from urban transport.

Consultation:

We hope that the imminent consultation will illustrate the benefits of reduced congestion, compared to the present day, by modelling sensitivity to traffic volume of different impacts, for different scenarios:

- Average journey time
- Value of time saved due to reduced congestion
- Emissions of NOx and particulates within Reading
- Emissions of CO2 across the whole simulation model area, not only within Borough boundaries.

The proposed 8-month period of public consultation, with Business Case preparation not starting until April 2019 and then taking 5 months, seems very long ... can some measures be brought forward in parallel with a shortened consultation period?

Less Traffic - Better Town:

Levels of congestion, air quality, and climate-changing emissions from transport in Reading must be improved rapidly. Traffic reduction meets all these objectives, and congestion charging schemes can fund public transport and other transport improvements.

Congestion:

Businesses, visitors and residents suffer from congestion, and it contributes to increased carbon emissions and dirtier air. It is likely that the greatest economic impact is from loss of time.

Local Plan Transport Modelling: Peter Brett Associates' Local Plan Transport Modelling Report derives values for traffic flow in section 4.3.3 and says "These figures demonstrate that despite there being a large increase in trip demand there is a smaller increase in actual flow. This would indicate that large areas of the network are unable to accommodate the additional trip demands particularly in the central and southern areas."

It is a matter of concern that the Peter Brett report does not model the impact of the proposed settlement at Grazeley – any assessment for the Transport Plan must include this scenario so that its impact can be assessed.

Smart M4 Modelling: The wide-area simulations for 'Smart M4' showed that in 2037 compared with 2009 there were 31% more trips, speed was down by 9%, average journey time was up by 11%.

Sensitivity testing: Modelling future traffic scenarios for Reading will shed light on the implications of traffic growth, and the economic benefits of traffic reduction. Sensitivity testing should be carried out, and this will allow the economic impact of more or less traffic to be calculated.

Sensitivity testing for the Grazeley 'Call-in Inquiry' in 1999 showed that, for a congested scenario:

- A 5% fall in traffic volumes gave approximately 30% fall in average journey time in the morning peak.
- Reducing peak hour traffic by 5% would reduce total journey time by 4,480 hours per day, worth £15,098 per day at 1998 prices. So there would be economic break-even by charging about 25,000 vehicles about 60p each to fund spending £11.89 per day (e.g. on subsidy for public transport) for each vehicle induced not to travel in the peak hours.

Clean Air:

Modelling for the Council suggests that Reading will meet the legal requirement for NO₂ by the end of 2021 but this is not a safe threshold level. (Item 12 - SEPT – November 2018).

The Council has estimated, based on measured PM₁₀ at three monitoring stations, that the concentration of PM_{2.5} is up to 60% above WHO guide levels – and again this is not a safe threshold level. (Question to SEPT – November 2018).

The aim should be to improve air quality to well below the WHO guidelines. The Council should produce estimates of health impacts of current levels of traffic and for future scenarios.

In context of a Transport Plan improvements can be made by general traffic reduction or by targeted reduction in use of particularly high-emitting vehicles – as the Council is doing by upgrading its bus fleet.

Climate Change:

Transport is now the single largest source of greenhouse gas emissions in the UK, accounting for 27% of domestic emissions in 2016. The Committee on Climate Change (CCC) has highlighted the lack of progress in the transport sector, and made clear that without rapid action, the fourth and fifth carbon budgets (covering the periods 2023-2027 and 2028-2032 respectively) will be missed.

The UK government has asked the Committee on Climate Change to identify what additional effort above that already agreed through the UK's Climate Change Act is needed to reduce emissions to meet a 1.5 °C warming target.

A study for Friends of the Earth by 'Transport for Quality of Life' suggests that the level of traffic reduction needed by 2030 could be anywhere between 20% and 60%, depending on factors including the speed of the switch to electric vehicles and how fast the electricity powering them is decarbonised.

Carbon Budget: The Climate Change Committee's fifth carbon budget 'Sectoral Scenarios' report shows in 'Fig 1.7 – abatement to 2030' national transport emissions dropping from 130 million tonnes CO2 in 2013 to 68 million tonnes in 2030 - a fall of 48%.

Smart M4 Modelling: The wide-area simulations for 'Smart M4' showed that in 2037 compared with 2009 carbon emissions would rise by 8%.

Options for Improvement:

To reduce traffic requires some combination of fewer journeys and/or modal shift to multi-occupancy vehicles and cycling and walking. To reduce pollution requires some combination of traffic reduction and change to 'greener' types of vehicle.

The trends to on-line shopping and working from home, and reduction in proportion of young people driving cars, are counteracted by the growth in housing and population mandated by central government planning policies

There are many options which require detailed professional evaluation:

Cycling and Walking:

These modes should be given appropriate priority above public transport and general traffic. In particular safe access to, from, and across the town centre should be improved.

Workplace Parking Levies and Travel Plans:

The Nottingham experience shows that workplace parking levies deliver some direct reduction in traffic as well as funding for other initiatives. They could be introduced in Reading to address heavy use of private cars for commuting.

- Larger companies should be required to produce Travel Plans covering business use and commuting. They should offer cycle allowances, provide cycle parking and showers, and promote public transport and car sharing.
- Parking levy could be discounted if businesses can show that significant numbers of their staff commute in multi-occupancy vehicles – whether by 'car sharing' or by using vehicles provided by the company – at cost of some additional bureaucracy.

Automatic Number Plate Recognition:

The technology for Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) is available and affordable – and is in use in Reading for bus lane enforcement. There are many ways that it can be deployed and many different charging strategies:

Deployment:

- Allowing general vehicles to pay to use bus lanes – either with or without a parallel free-to-access lane for general traffic.
- Charging for access to particular stretches of road or at particular junctions – e.g. Cemetery Junction on the A4 - to achieve local traffic reduction

- Charging for use of a major route – e.g. with several cameras along the A4 and IDR and at the bridges to allow charge to depend on number of cameras passed – or for driving within an area. Charging by distance, time and place.
- Cordon monitoring around an inner area or the whole built-up area

Charging strategies:

- Penalty charge on vehicles forbidden to use a particular road – whether general vehicles in a bus lane or a particular engine type in a clean air zone.
- Charge varying with time of day
- Charge varying with engine standard and type as a proxy for air quality emissions
- Charge varying with residency status of registered owner
- Charge per day or charge for each detection

The right choice for deployment and charging strategy will require technical and economic assessment and political judgement.

Car Park control:

The Transport Plan should look at reducing car parking spaces (perhaps selling off or compulsory purchase?), regulating parking charges, and introducing on-line booking for car parking places to reduce queuing.

As with road user charging the price of parking can be varied with time of day, duration of stay, and/or with engine specification.

Public Transport priority and support:

The Transport Plan should consider introduction of bus lanes wherever road width allows – in particular along Forbury Road and the A4 between Cemetery Junction and Suttons Roundabout - to speed up bus journeys between the town centre and Wokingham Borough.

Traffic light systems should actively prioritise buses, for example at Suttons Roundabout, on the A4 between London Street and Kendrick Road, and around the Watlington Street gyratory.

The options of free or reduced-fare buses should be considered to reduce congestion and demand for parking e.g. at the hospital. With possible funding from congestion charging to subsidise some bus fares movement to a more widely free model might be facilitated and could further counterbalance the introduction of bridge tolls and a congestion charge zone. A fully free public transport model has now 6 years of success in Tallinn, Estonia - a city of comparable size to Reading. Many other cities in Europe are also operating free public transport (sometimes only to residents) with an overall benefit to the local economy, significant traffic reduction, and accompanying air quality improvements. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-france-paris-transportation/paris-mulls-free-public-transport-to-reduce-pollution-idUSKBN1GW1KU>

Light rail public transport should be considered for the routes Reading Station to Green Park and Reading Station to Thames Valley Park.

Power supplies for electric and hydrogen-powered vehicles:

The Council should continue to support work to enable on-street charging for electric vehicles and provision of charge points in domestic, business and commercial car parks.

The Committee on Climate Change sees use of Hydrogen fuel by heavy vehicles such as buses as an important opportunity. The Council should monitor progress with this, and consider what measures are appropriate to enable supply of hydrogen fuel for heavy vehicles and long-range lighter vehicles.

Further integrate transport planning with neighbouring authorities:

Work with neighbouring authorities so that they encourage use of multi-occupancy vehicles by provision of park and ride sites, bus terminals, bus priority measures etc.

Manage the 'Smart M4':

The Council should engage with Highways England to reduce the number and severity of occasions when Reading becomes an 'M4 Bypass' due to accidents and congestion between Junctions 10 and 12 of the M4.

The 'Smart M4' technology will enable speed control – this should be used to reduce accidents and delays – and limit traffic volumes on this trunk road.

Railways:

Electrification and the 'Digital Railway' are expected to increase the capacity of the railways. For the longer term the Transport Plan should investigate:

- A new station on the Waterloo line at NW corner of Suttons Business Park (NE of Liverpool Road) to serve Suttons Business Park, Newtown, and connect to Thames Valley Park via shuttle bus.
- A new station at Thames Valley Park (in Wokingham) to give access to the Elizabeth line and services to Heathrow.

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