

Agenda Item IMD10

INDIVIDUAL EXECUTIVE MEMBER DECISION

REFERENCE IMD: 2020/10

TITLE	WBC Response to Reading's Local Transport Plan Consultation
DECISION TO BE MADE BY	Executive Member for Highways and Transport - Pauline Jorgensen
DATE, MEETING ROOM and TIME	20 August 2020 Virtually at 5pm
WARD	None specific
DIRECTOR / KEY OFFICER	Director, Place and Growth - Chris Trill

PURPOSE OF REPORT (Inc Strategic Outcomes)

The Reading Local Transport Plan 4 (2020-36) Transport Strategy 2036 Consultation Draft May 2020 sets out Reading's plan for transport in the town up to 2036. This draft is being consulted on with the public with response required by 30 August 2020.

As a neighbouring authority it is important to assess how Wokingham Borough and its residents and businesses will be affected by the plan and also to ensure that the plan meets any requirements the borough may have in future.

This report sets out a recommended response to the consultation which closes on the 30 August.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Executive Member for Highways and Transport approves the proposed response as set out in Appendix 2.

SUMMARY OF REPORT

This report outlines the key areas of interest to Wokingham Borough in Reading Borough's Local Transport Plan.

Appendix 1 provides a detailed summary of the issues in the consultation document and makes comment on the position of Wokingham Borough Council. Appendix 2 sets out a recommended response to the consultation which closes on 30 August 2020.

Key areas of concern include:

Congestion in Wokingham – how any of the proposal might impact on the current situation.

Demand Management – ensuring that the proposed measures are fair and do not impact on the borough negatively.

Public Transport – ensuring that routes in Wokingham and Wokingham’s residents do not bear the brunt of any changes in Reading.

Park and Ride – ensuring that these are viable in future and are a more attractive option including by reducing prices through sharing revenues generated in Reading Town Centre.

Schemes and their Delivery - Whilst we support many of the schemes we need to ensure that infrastructure is installed that benefits both parties there should be a contribution to their construction as well as ongoing revenue support where appropriate.

Third Thames Crossing - Although the scheme is half in Wokingham borough and half in South Oxfordshire district, the majority of the benefits will be felt by Reading residents. WBC remains supportive, however, it is essential that a financially sustainable model for construction and ongoing maintenance be identified

Background

The Reading Local Transport Plan 4 (2020-36) Transport Strategy 2036 Consultation Draft May 2020 sets out Reading Borough’s plan for transport in the town up to 2036. The report is well structured with the following sections:

1. Introduction
2. Vision & Objectives
3. About Reading
4. Challenges & Opportunities
5. Our Policies
6. Our Schemes & Initiatives
7. Funding & Implementation
8. Partnerships & Stakeholders
9. Monitoring & Review

The consultation asks six questions, which are:

Question 1 - Key Challenges and Policies

Question 2 - Schemes and Initiatives

Question 3 - Funding Sources

Question 4 - Cycling and Walking Routes

Question 5 - Covid-19 Crisis

Question 6 - General Comments

The full consultation documentation can be found here:

<https://consult.reading.gov.uk/dens/reading-transport-strategy-2036/>

Appendix 1 provides a detailed summary of the issues in the document and makes comment on the position of Wokingham Borough Council (WBC) based on our own Local Transport Plan and taking into account other strategy and policy documents and activities including the Climate Emergency and emerging Local Plan. Below is a very brief description of the key highlights of the plan where Wokingham Borough might be most affected. Appendix 2 sets out a recommended response to the consultation which closes on 30 August 2020.

Business Case (including Analysis of Issues)

A summary of the draft plan is briefly described below; further details and WBC's position can be found in Appendix 1 of this report.

Challenges

The Challenges and Opportunities section identifies seven key challenges:

1. Adapting to the future
2. Improving air quality
3. Reducing car congestion and the negative effects it causes
4. Providing affordable and accessible travel for all
5. Removing barriers to healthy lifestyles
6. Achieving good accessibility to local facilities and employment
7. Accommodating development and delivering the Local Plan

Policies

Having identified these challenges, the draft plan proposes 30 policies to address them. These fall into five areas:

- Multi-modal policies including sustainable transport, development control, equality and inclusivity, the environment and climate change and smart solutions and innovation.
- Public transport policies including rail, buses, taxis and private hire vehicles, waterways, mobility as a service, shared autonomous vehicles and travel information.
- Active travel policies including healthy streets, public space, walking and cycling, school travel, public rights of way.
- Network management policies including road safety, parking and enforcement, motorcycles, freight, smart solutions and highway asset management and demand management policies to manage travel demand and improve quality of life for residents.
- Communication and engagement policies including training and education, incentivisation and public engagement.

Schemes and Initiatives

The plan details a number of schemes and initiatives are proposed to help deliver the strategy, these cover the following seven areas:

- Demand management schemes to achieve the vision for Reading, making difficult choices and potentially delivering a clean air zone, emissions-based and road user charging and a workplace levy;
- Multi-modal schemes providing benefits to all road users by smoothing traffic flow, providing more reliable journey times and improving air quality and productivity;
- Public transport schemes to provide a step change in public transport provision in Reading;
- Active travel schemes incorporating healthy streets principles and best practice to improve the attractiveness of walking and cycling leading to improved air quality, health and wellbeing;
- Network management schemes to manage demand and improve network efficiency and safety;
- Communication and engagement schemes to promote benefits and enhancements that the proposed schemes bring; and
- Complementary national and regional schemes to enhance connectivity and facilitate development.

Funding and Implementation

This section suggest that Reading Borough Council is under increasing financial pressure, with cuts to budgets and inconsistent streams of funding available. Therefore, identifying funding from other sources is seen as critical to enable Reading Borough Council to deliver the infrastructure Reading needs to support its residents, employees, visitors and economy.

Partnerships and Stakeholders

The draft plan highlights Reading Borough Council's commitment to ongoing consultation, consideration of different viewpoints and partnership working across Local Authority boundaries (with WBC highlighted as a key neighbouring local authority delivery partner).

Monitoring and Review

A total of twelve performance indicators have been identified to monitor performance which are:

- Car trips to, from and through the town centre;
- Road transport carbon emissions;
- Bus usage in the Borough;
- Park and Ride usage;
- Rail usage - entries and exits for all stations;
- Public transport trips to the town centre;

- Proportion of adults walking at least 3 times per week for main journey purpose;
- Proportion of adults cycling at least 3 times per week for main journey purpose;
- Active travel trips to, from and through the town centre;
- All people killed or seriously injured on the highway network in the Borough;
- Public satisfaction with highway maintenance (including roads, footways and street lighting); and
- School travel planning and Modeshift STARS accreditation.

Key Issues

The Local Transport Plan is generally a positive document and there are numerous policies and strategies that Wokingham Borough Council support. In general it is recommended that we do not object to the Plan and indicate a continued wish and expectation to work in partnership with Reading Borough Council to help deliver some of its objectives and to support Wokingham Borough residents and businesses needing to access the goods and services of Reading; some of these opportunities to work together are highlighted in the recommended response.

There are however a few issues to note. These are highlighted in the recommended response (see Appendix 2). The issues to note include:

Congestion in Wokingham Borough

It is important that any measures implemented to improve the performance of the road network in Reading, or aid sustainable transport, do not result in the traffic rerouting onto nearby roads in the WBC network, increasing congestion and emissions and reducing air quality within this borough. Issues must be addressed and resolved, and not simply push negative impacts elsewhere.

Demand Management

Demand Management measures are potentially difficult to justify where alternatives are not readily available or viable for many people; this is particularly the case for those in rural areas who depend on a car to make at least part of their journey; if bus services can reach these rural areas, or Park and Ride has capacity and is cheap enough and fast enough to make it a natural choice then it is recommended that we support this. Otherwise it may be seen simply as a tax on those who have no other option. As with all the measures proposed the impact on the surrounding network wherever the boundary of such schemes falls needs to be considered carefully and mitigated where necessary.

Changes to pricing and restriction in the town centre need to be offset by reductions in costs of Park and Ride and bus journeys from neighbouring boroughs and beyond wherever possible. It is recommended that Reading Borough Council ring-fence revenue to support sustainable measures not only within Reading Borough but also neighbouring boroughs such as Wokingham Borough.

Public Transport

With regard to public transport schemes, the provision of infrastructure and better journey time reliability should lead to increase patronage and so make more routes commercially viable; WBC would like to see more routes which cross the borough boundary to continue to provide a service and would like to work with Reading BC and Reading Buses to develop routes for the benefit of our residents which do not require subsidy in the longer term.

As the majority of bus service provision across Wokingham Borough is provided by Reading Buses (owned by Reading Borough Council) and Courtney Buses (a subsidiary of Reading Buses), WBC recognise the important role that Reading Borough Council play in providing high-quality, accessible bus services for all residents and support the desire for additional bus priority outside of Reading Borough. It is also important that fares on bus services within Wokingham Borough and across its boundaries should be affordable and any alterations to fare structures or concessionary fare policies should be administered fairly and consistently both within and outside of the Reading Borough boundary. It would be unfair for residents of neighbouring boroughs to indirectly fund, through fare increases and increasing subsidies, the cost of any widening of the concessionary fare scheme within Reading Borough. Reading Buses have curtailed and cancelled routes due to their not being commercially viable in Wokingham Borough. WBC ask that a holistic view is taken and the benefit that the services bring to Reading Borough should be considered; whilst we acknowledge Reading Buses make a profit, the principle of a local authority profiting from its neighbours whilst it is within their gift to provide an improved service at lower cost is at odds with the heart of what the Reading Transport Strategy is trying to achieve.

WBC will work in partnership with Reading Borough Council to investigate the potential for expansion of the concessionary fares scheme which could provide a financial incentive encouraging bus travel in Reading and Wokingham Boroughs, leading to a mode shift away from the private car. However, WBC is concerned that this scheme could lead to increases to fares outside the Borough and WBC consider that it is essential that bus fares on bus services both within Wokingham Borough and across its boundaries are affordable. Any alterations to fare structures or concessionary fare policies should be administered fairly and consistently both within and outside of the Reading Borough boundary and should not impact affordability of services to residents located outside Reading Borough.

Park and Ride

WBC supports the proposed upgrades to existing Park and Ride facilities (indeed some are already underway). However, as part of the evolution and upgrade of Park and Ride sites, the need for existing and proposed sites, along with their associated bus services, to become self-funding should be borne in mind. Self-funding may mean that parking/bus charges are preventative to many who might switch to park and ride and so serious consideration should be given to subsidy for park and ride from revenue generated from demand management and parking in the town.

Schemes and their Delivery

It is clear that many of the schemes require either cooperation or the full support and implementation by other boroughs including Wokingham Borough Council. Whilst we support many of the schemes we need to ensure that infrastructure is installed that benefits both parties there should be a contribution to their construction as well as ongoing revenue support where appropriate.

Third Thames Crossing

As a delivery partner, WBC are supportive of the Third Thames Crossing East of Reading. The scheme offers Reading an opportunity to significantly improve the traffic in the centre of Reading by removing many through trips whilst also helping resilience of the network and providing better access to employment opportunities for those severed by the river. Although the scheme is half in Wokingham Borough and half in South Oxfordshire District, the majority of the benefits will be felt by Reading residents. WBC remains supportive in principle, however, it is essential that a financially sustainable model for construction and ongoing maintenance be identified as part of the project along with all the mitigation work which the project team is already investigating.

Consultation

This paper was circulated to all ward members in July to enable them to feed into the process at an early stage. One response was received and comments have been incorporated into the response.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

The Council faces severe funding pressures, particularly in the face of the COVID-19 crisis. It is therefore imperative that Council resources are focused on the vulnerable and on its highest priorities.

	How much will it Cost/ (Save)	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
Current Financial Year (Year 1)	n/a	n/a	n/a
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	n/a	n/a	n/a
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	n/a	n/a	n/a

Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision

None

Cross-Council Implications

None

Public Sector Equality Duty
This is a response to a consultation by our neighbouring borough; whilst our response considers the needs of all, it is the duty of Reading Borough Council to ensure that the final strategy includes a full Equalities impact assessment.

SUMMARY OF CONSULTATION RESPONSES	
Director – Corporate Services	No comment
Monitoring Officer	No comment
Leader of the Council	No comment

Reasons for considering the report in Part 2
N/A

List of Background Papers
Appendix 1 – Summary of the draft Reading Transport Strategy and Wokingham position
Appendix 2 – Proposed response to the consultation

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