

# 1 ONLINE CONSULTATION QUESTIONNAIRE

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- 1.1.1. The online consultation questionnaire has six questions. Each question is detailed in the following section, along with a suggested WBC response, where applicable.

## 1.2 QUESTION 1 - KEY CHALLENGES AND POLICIES

**Q1. What alternative policies do you think should be included in order to tackle the challenges identified in the strategy?**

WBC Response:

### **CHALLENGES**

- 1.2.1. No formal evidence base has been provided to support the RTS and, as a result, a sound evidential basis underpinning each of the seven challenges presented is not always available. However, it is undeniable that congestion is an issue and is also a key concern to Wokingham Borough Council (WBC).
- 1.2.2. WBC recognises the importance of adapting to the future and supports the Smart Cities approach and the development of Mobility as a Service but would encourage increased emphasis within the RTS around knowledge sharing and partnership working to ensure the adoption of a common app-based journey planning and payment solution across Berkshire and the Thames Valley to maximise the benefits for all residents.
- 1.2.3. As the majority of bus service provision across Wokingham Borough is provided by Reading Buses (owned by RBC) and Courtney Buses (a subsidiary of Reading Buses), WBC recognise the important role that RBC 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 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 or artificially low fare prices within Reading Borough. Reading Buses have curtailed and cancelled routes due to their not being commercially viable in Wokingham Borough, we would 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.
- 1.2.4. WBC supports efforts to address the ongoing climate emergency by encouraging modal shift to sustainable modes. However, it is important that measures included within the RTS do not lead to a deterioration in conditions on the road network of neighbouring boroughs. For example measures to reduce congestion and improve air quality on the Inner Distribution Road (IDR) in Central Reading are likely to lead to existing traffic re-routing onto WBC roads such as Sonning Bridge and the M4. This will likely result in additional congestion on WBC roads and a potential worsening of air quality in Wokingham Borough, including within the M4 AQMA.

- 1.2.5. In addition to not sufficiently considering the likely impacts of measures on surrounding boroughs, the scale of existing congestion issue within Reading Borough is also not quantified within the RTS. It is stated that congestion around Reading continues to grow but, whilst WBC acknowledge that Reading is one of the most congested towns in the UK, only limited evidence is provided to support this statement. Plots from the 2015 AM Peak model are provided but these are out of date and do not quantify the scale of the stated congestion increase. Other evidence presented in the RTS to further demonstrate the increased congestion issue is either unreferenced; incorrectly referenced or described; or does not include the year it refers to and so does not provide further clarity. The RTS does make reference elsewhere to DfT Road Congestion Statistics Table CGN0502B (February 2018). However, instead of showing an increase, this table shows that the average delay on locally managed 'A' roads in Reading Borough fell 5% between 2015 and 2018.
- 1.2.6. Lastly, it is not possible to assess the ability of the RTS to help accommodate development and deliver the RBC Local Plan. Although it is reasonable to predict an increase in car traffic as a result of development, no evidence has been presented to support that statement and key corridors and rat-runs that will be affected, both inside Reading Borough and across the neighbouring Boroughs, have not been identified.

## **POLICIES**

### **Multi-Modal**

- 1.2.7. WBC are broadly supportive of the six multi-modal policies (RTS1 to RTS6). Recognising the importance of measures to address the ongoing Climate Emergency, WBC will continue to partner with RBC, along with its other neighbouring authorities, to bring forward measures to encourage further and more significant modal shift to more sustainable modes. However, when considering schemes that involve the reallocation of road space, the expected impacts of the road networks in neighbouring boroughs should be fully understood and quantified, to ensure that congestion and air quality problems within Reading Borough are not just shifted outside the borough and onto the road networks of the neighbouring boroughs.

### **Public Transport**

- 1.2.8. WBC are broadly supportive of the six public transport policies (RTS7 to RTS12). However, WBC consider Policies RTS8 and RTS9 should be expanded, as appropriate, to include the following:
- As part of the evolution and upgrade of Park and Ride sites, existing and proposed sites, along with their associated bus services, should become self-funding and made significantly cheaper by using demand management and in-town parking revenues to subsidise the bus services;
  - Enhanced service provision and faster journey times on the Reading to London Waterloo rail line as the line runs parallel to the A329 between Bracknell and Reading and additional modal shift to this rail line could play a key role in reducing congestion along this route;
  - Delivery of the Heathrow Western Rail Link now and not as a by-product of expansion;
  - The electrification of the North Downs Line and associated service improvements; and
  - Prior to the opening of the Heathrow Western Rail Link, maintain and encourage development of the existing coach services to Heathrow Airport that operate from Reading Station (RailAir) or Mereok Park and Ride (National Express).

### **Active Travel**

- 1.2.9. As a partner authority in the Reading Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan, WBC fully supports the improvements to walking and cycling it outlines and looks forward to working with RBC and West Berkshire Council to deliver the measures it proposes.
- 1.2.10. Having had input into Reading's Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan, WBC are broadly supportive of the four active transport policies (RTS13 to RTS16). However, as outlined earlier, when considering schemes that involve the reallocation of road space, the expected impacts of the road networks in neighbouring boroughs should be fully understood and quantified, to ensure that congestion and air quality problems within Reading Borough are not just shifted onto the road networks of the neighbouring boroughs. We are also keen to ensure that the routes continue across borough boundaries and will aim to align works and timescales so that this is achieved in Wokingham Borough.

### **Network and Demand Management**

- 1.2.11. WBC has some concerns regarding the network and demand management policies (RTS17 to RTS28):
- The RTS includes no information relating to current or forecast traffic levels, the only up-to-date data presented is the annual town centre cordon counts presented in Figure 16. Therefore, it is not possible to establish where network performance issues currently arising or forecast to arise and so the potential for additional impacts on WBC roads cannot be determined;
  - it is important that any parking measures implemented on RBC roads do not lead to increased parking or congestion issues on neighbouring WBC roads; 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 and we would like to see this revenue ring-fenced to sustainable measures but not to just within the Reading boundary but to measures beyond the Reading area.
  - 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 we would 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.
  - It is important that any innovations are shared across borough boundaries and that future services such as Mobility as a Service are able to operate on a wider scale across the Berkshire and Thames Valley area on a single platform with a common payment system for the benefit of all residents across Berkshire and the Thames Valley and not just RBC residents.

### **Communication and Engagement Policies**

- 1.2.12. WBC are supportive of the two network and communication and engagement policies (RTS29 and RTS30).

## 1.3 QUESTION 2 - SCHEMES AND INITIATIVES

### Q2. What alternative schemes and initiatives do you think should be included in order to tackle the challenges identified in the strategy?

#### WBC Response:

- 1.3.1. It is clear that many of the schemes require either cooperation or the full support and implementation by other boroughs including WBC. Whilst WBC is broadly supportive of many of the schemes, it is important that when infrastructure is installed that benefits Reading significantly there should be a contribution from Reading Borough Council for construction as well as ongoing revenue support.
- 1.3.2. The schemes and policies in the document have clear cross-boundary impacts and it is essential that we work together, sharing data, knowledge and resources where appropriate. There are many projects such as freight/consolidation, EV provision and cycle hire, where there may be significant benefit in jointly working on schemes and sharing procurement and delivery costs, it is acknowledged that much of Wokingham Borough is closely linked to Reading and our residents use Reading's facilities and so are impacted by and should benefit from the RTS.
- 1.3.3. When considering schemes that involve the reallocation of road space, the expected impacts of the road networks in neighbouring boroughs should be fully understood and quantified, to ensure that congestion and air quality problems within Reading Borough are not just shifted outside the borough and onto the road networks of the neighbouring boroughs, including Wokingham Borough.
- 1.3.4. As acknowledged within the RTS, delivery of certain schemes is dependent on the successful delivery of other schemes and therefore the delivery of schemes needs to be carefully monitored to ensure as scheme prerequisites are in place, where required.
- 1.3.5. With regard to public transport schemes, the provision of infrastructure and better journey time reliability should lead to increased 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 Borough Council and Reading Buses to develop routes for the benefit of our residents which do not require subsidy in the longer term. We do have some concerns on our current bus routes such as those in Earley which suffer from reliability issues and overcrowding; we request that these are considered as part of a holistic approach to bus service improvements for all users including those coming from outside the borough. WBC would like to see more schemes in Central Reading tackling the congestion issues which Reading Buses have raised, particularly around the hospital where a number of bus routes have had to be re-timetabled and routed in Wokingham Borough to accommodate the additional journey time now required in Reading Borough as a result of congestion.
- 1.3.6. 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 crossing itself would be 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 as part of the project along with all the mitigation work which the project team is already investigating.

## 1.4 QUESTION 3 - FUNDING SOURCES

**Q3. What alternative funding sources could we also consider to fund the proposed schemes in our strategy?**

WBC Response:

1.4.1. No response given.

## 1.5 QUESTION 4 - CYCLING AND WALKING ROUTES

1.5.1. Our Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP), developed in partnership with WBC and West Berkshire Council, is a sub-strategy to the Reading Transport Strategy 2036. The LCWIP sets out ambitious plans to transform our streets and encourage more people to choose cycling and walking for local journeys, or as part of longer multi-modal journeys.

**Q4. Do you have any suggestions on our proposed network of walking and cycling routes or on our proposals to create more attractive streets with improved walking and cycling facilities as set out in the LCWIP?**

WBC Response:

1.5.2. As a partner in the development of this Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan, WBC fully supports the improvements to walking and cycling facilities it outlines, along with the walking and cycling network it proposes. Over time, WBC intends to spread the LCWIP methodology across the borough and we would expect this to cover the whole borough and cross boundaries as necessary to achieve a cohesive network; we would appreciate support in achieving this goal in future.

## 1.6 QUESTION 5 - COVID-19 CRISIS

1.6.1. The Reading Transport Strategy was drafted before Covid-19 had developed into a national and international crisis. Even now, the full impact it will have on society and the economy is unknown. The ability of the transport sector to adapt and continue during these times has been a key element in keeping access to our vital services and the world moving, and we now consider bus and train drivers, community transport operators and delivery drivers as key workers. Once the Covid-19 crisis passes and the world returns to some sense of normality the transport sector will also be key in supporting the rebuilding of our economy, providing access to our key services for health, education, shopping and leisure and enabling us to visit our families and friends again.

**Q5. What impact do you think the Covid-19 crisis will have on future transport behaviour and attitudes to travel and how do you think our Transport Strategy can help support this as well as the recovery of our neighbourhoods, economy and environment?**

WBC Response:

1.6.2. Time will tell whether there any long term changes to travel behaviour. An element of the strategy that could assist with this is the Smart Cities initiative and also work to encourage and enable working from home across the region. The current increase in active travel could

be sustained if safe routes are available however, the loss of carriageway space may prove prohibitive, depending on what happens during the recovery period. This will require careful monitoring on the streets feeding into the borough. Public Transport is currently struggling significantly due to social distancing requirements, supporting this recovery is also going to be a major challenge.

## 1.7 QUESTION 6 - GENERAL COMMENTS

**Q6. Please let us know if there anything else you would like to see included in the Reading Transport Strategy 2036? Put any other comments here.**

### WBC Response:

- 1.7.1. WBC is broadly supportive of the policies and schemes outlined within the RTS and, as identified within the RTS, our close partnership with Reading Borough Council means that we are a key delivery partner for many of the schemes.
- 1.7.2. Recognising the importance of measures to address the ongoing Climate Emergency, WBC will continue to partner with Reading Borough Council, along with its other neighbouring authorities, to bring forward measures to encourage further and more significant modal shift to more sustainable modes. We, therefore, welcome Policy RTS1 Sustainable Transport which includes a commitment to developing sustainable transport schemes in partnership with neighbouring boroughs to support an increase in sustainable cross-boundary journeys; Policy RTS17 Network Management that commits to managing the network to facilitate the movement of people, prioritising sustainable transport; and Policy RTS20 Parking that commits to managing parking provision to influence sustainable travel choices.
- 1.7.3. WBC share the view that, as noted in Paragraph 5.19, a 'well-integrated, attractive and efficient public transport network is essential for meeting people movement demands of the future'. WBC welcome the commitment in Policy RTS7 Public Transport to build on the well-established bus and rail connections and work with partners across the wider region to establish an accessible, affordable, reliable and sustainable, integrated public transport network.
- 1.7.4. WBC supports the proposed upgrades to existing Park and Ride facilities, including the additional provision of electric charging points for vehicles; the creation of associated facilities and amenities for drivers to use while waiting for onwards buses or for their vehicles to charge; and the creation of green hubs. 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; these are a combined measure which when considered as a whole will have a greater impact than each measure on its own.
- 1.7.5. High-quality and fast access public transport services are an essential feature of the two existing Park and Ride sites located within Wokingham Borough at Mere oak and Winnersh Triangle, along with the two proposed sites at Thames Valley Park and Coppid Beech. We welcome the commitment to invest in the South and East Fast Track Public Transport (FTPT) Corridors connecting to each of these Park and Ride sites, along with the new proposed development at Grazeley Garden Town. These services will also help to facilitate development at the four existing WBC Strategic Development Locations, set out in the

adopted Wokingham Core Strategy and identified in Policy SS1 of the WBC Draft Local Plan Update (LPU) February 2020 and complement existing policies in the WBC Local Transport Plan 3. To ensure their longevity, these FTPT services should be developed in line with the growth in demand for them to ensure that they are self-funding.

- 1.7.6. WBC also welcome the proposed Quality Bus Corridor between Reading and Wokingham via Shinfield and Arborfield which will also help to facilitate planned development at Arborfield Garrison.
- 1.7.7. WBC supports the potential for expansion of the concessionary fares scheme which could provide a financial incentive encouraging bus travel leading to a mode shift away from the private car. However, WBC is concerned that this scheme could lead to increases to fares outside of Reading 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.
- 1.7.8. The RTS highlights the need for Reading to have affordable bus fares. Whilst WBC supports this, it must not be at the cost of undermining the viability of the service. It would be unfair for WBC residents to pay higher fares or increased subsidy prices to allow RBC residents to have cheaper fares/more affordable travel.
- 1.7.9. The extension of the TfL Rail Elizabeth Line services from Maidenhead to Reading, outlined in Paragraph 3.60, was also welcomed by WBC as it provided enhanced service level and journey opportunities from Twyford station, located Wokingham Borough. However, whilst WBC recognises the importance of fast end-to-end journey times between Reading and London Paddington, the retention of the all-day semi-fast and peak time fast services from Twyford, operated by GWR, is considered essential by WBC, as these services provide fast links for Borough residents to Slough, Heathrow Airport (via Hayes and Harlington) and London Paddington, along with providing additional capacity into Reading. In addition, WBC consider that the deferred electrification of the Henley Branch Line is needed to be completed as soon as possible.
- 1.7.10. WBC welcomes the commitment in Policy RTS9 Rail to lobby for improved rail services to and from Reading and WBC also support the improvements to the North Downs Line outlined in Paragraph 5.31. However, WBC notes that no specific mention is made within the strategy of the vital rail link between Reading and London Waterloo that passes through Earley, Winnersh, Winnersh Triangle and Wokingham, all located in Wokingham Borough. We consider that enhanced service provision and faster journey times on this line should be included in the strategy, as the line runs parallel to the A329 between Bracknell and Reading and additional modal shift to this rail line could play a key role in reducing congestion along this route.
- 1.7.11. WBC welcomes the commitment in Paragraph 5.30 (and throughout the strategy) to continue to push for the Western Rail Link to Heathrow, which remains the Thames Valley Berkshire LEP's number one priority and was included in Policy SS12 of the WBC Draft LPU but was notably not firmly committed to as part of the latest Heathrow Airport Surface Access Proposals. WBC remain in agreement with the Berkshire Members Strategic Planning Group that the Western Rail Link is needed now and not as a by-product of expansion. WBC also

remains committed to supporting the Southern Rail Link to Heathrow, which is referenced in the Strategy in Paragraph 6.42.

- 1.7.12. WBC note that the strategy contains no mention of the existing coach services to Heathrow Airport that operate from Reading Station (RailAir) or MereOak Park and Ride (National Express). WBC consider that prior to the opening of the Heathrow Western Rail Link, while both services operate on a commercial basis, a policy seeking to maintain and develop these services would be of value. This policy would also support the shared desire of WBC and Reading Borough Council to attract more motorway coach services to stop at MereOak Park and Ride as part of plans for the expansion of MereOak Park and Ride, for which WBC are a delivery partner.
- 1.7.13. WBC has experienced the benefits of operating its Permit Scheme since 2015. Given that delays due to street works on the road network in Reading Borough can have knock-on impacts on neighbouring WBC roads, WBC welcomes Policy RTS19 Street works committing to investigating methods to improve the management of street works such as permit and charging schemes.
- 1.7.14. As a partner in the Thames Valley Berkshire Smart Cities Cluster project, WBC supports Policy RTS27 Smart City Approach.
- 1.7.15. The North Reading Orbital Route and Third Thames Crossing East of Reading are two key schemes that WBC support, on the latter WBC are a key delivery partner. Policy SS11 of the WBC Draft LPU proposes that the land required to deliver the Third Thames Crossing will be safeguarded. From many parts of Wokingham Borough (including Thames Valley Business Park), the most direct and often fastest route to the north side of Reading and beyond involves passing through the centre of Reading using the IDR. While WBC supports the desire of RBC to reduce the number of through trips on the IDR, without the construction of both these schemes, any reallocation of space on the IDR to walking, cycling and public transport can be expected to cause significant additional congestion on the IDR. This, in turn, is likely to push some trips to use the longer route via Sonning Bridge, leading to further congestion on the bridge and on WBC roads in the surrounding area, including the A4. Construction of these two schemes will also facilitate the delivery of the northern part of the Orbital Fast Track Public Transport Corridor which will provide some residents of Wokingham Borough with new high-quality orbital journey opportunities around Reading, reducing the need to pass through Central Reading.