

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT, PLANNING & TRANSPORT COMMITTEE - 2 JULY 2018

QUESTION NO. 1 in accordance with Standing Order No.36

Enrico Petrucco to ask the Chair of Strategic Environment, Planning & Transport Committee:

Road User Charging Scheme

During a debate in Planning Committee last week on the ER-MRT scheme, suggestion was made that a road user charging scheme could not solve the traffic/congestion issue at the East Reading corridor A4. Please will you supply details of assessments and studies that support this assertion?

1A/. Including the detailed congestion modelling results for the Reading Centre leg of the prospective ER-MRT scheme?

REPLY by the Chair of the Strategic Environment, Planning & Transport Committee (Councillor Debs Absolom):

I invite Councillor Page, the Lead Councillor for Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport to make the response on my behalf.

REPLY by the Lead Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport (Councillor Page):

I thank Mr Petrucco for his question.

The Council has investigated a range of measures to help manage levels of congestion in Reading, as set out in our adopted Local Transport Plan (LTP) for the period 2011-26. This includes schemes to encourage the use of sustainable transport through the provision of greater capacity and enhanced facilities for public transport, walking and cycling; alongside measures to help manage travel demand, for instance through parking charges and controls.

The feasibility of road user charging has specifically been investigated for Reading though the package of measures proposed for the 2009 Transport Innovation Fund (TIF), a previous funding initiative by central Government. This work concluded that road user charging should not be progressed as a standalone scheme, rather a package of measures to enhance the provision of viable alternatives should be in place and the impact evaluated prior to any charging scheme being introduced.

Although the TIF initiative was eventually rescinded by Government, it led to the Local Sustainable Transport Fund which, combined with more recent investment secured through the Local Growth Fund has resulted in some progress being made in

implementing the sustainable transport schemes which were identified within the TIF package of measures.

This progress in implementing our strategy, alongside the significant levels of growth planned through the emerging Local Plans for Reading, West Berkshire and Wokingham, provides an appropriate time to update our transport strategy. This review will include investigating the feasibility of road user charging in comparison to other demand management measures. Further details on these plans are included in a report to the Council's Policy Committee on the 16th July.

As noted at the Planning Committee on 30th May, road user charging is not a straightforward process as demonstrated by the experience of other areas including Manchester. For a charging scheme to gain approval from the Secretary of State the consequences must be fully considered, therefore suggestions of implementing a charging scheme on a single stretch of road in the Borough are unlikely to be feasible due to the impact of displacement and re-routing of traffic onto alternative routes.

Regarding the East Reading MRT scheme, full details of the scheme business case including modelling results are available on the Council's website at <http://www.reading.gov.uk/transport-schemes-and-projects>. The business case was independently verified and approved, confirming the scheme represents high value for money in accordance with central Government guidance.