

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT BY DIRECTOR OF ENVIRONMENT & NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

TO:	TRAFFIC MANAGEMENT SUB-COMMITTEE		
DATE:	17 JUNE 2015	AGENDA ITEM:	7
TITLE:	TARGET JUNCTION IMPROVEMENT REVIEW & OPTIONS (BROAD STREET / ST MARY'S BUTTS / OXFORD ROAD / WEST STREET)		
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**1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to update the Sub-Committee on the trial switch-off of the traffic signals at the 'Target junction' which is the intersection of Broad Street / St Mary's Butts / Oxford Road / West Street. This report sets out the response to the trial so far and some proposals on what could be achieved should we minded to remove the traffic signals permanently.

**2. RECOMMENDED ACTION**

- 2.1 The Sub- Committee is asked to note the report.
- 2.2 The Sub-Committee notes representations and feedback so far and is recommended to continue with the trial to allow for further public consultation.
- 2.3 That the proposals shown on drawing TC/target concepts/01 be the basis of a public consultation reporting back to Traffic Management Sub-Committee in September.
- 2.4 That specific meetings be arranged with representatives of The Guide Dogs for the Blind and Blind Associations, the Access and Disabilities Group, Reading Buses and other relevant organisations.
- 2.5 That the Sub-Committee consider comments and detailed plans and confirm a final scheme proposal in September.

### **3. POLICY CONTEXT**

- 3.1 Reading Borough Council's Local Transport Plan provides the policy context for the proposed review.

### **4. THE PROPOSAL**

- 4.1 During early 2014 the traffic signals failed at the 'Target' junction of Broad Street with West Street and St Mary's Butts. Despite all the signals being out for over a week we received no complaints from members of the public and the only enquiries came from Reading Buses, who asked 'when will the traffic signals be repaired'. Throughout this period of traffic signal failure various observations were made by RBC officers, James Freeman of Reading Buses and the traffic signal contractor who worked on the fault to restore the signals. The observations lead to the question as to whether or not the traffic signals actually served any purpose. It seemed that during their failure both pedestrians and public transport appeared to benefit.

- 4.2 In January 2015 the traffic signals were switched off for a trial period (of at least six months) to allow all users to experience the junction in an "uncontrolled" state. There was initially media interest which prompted a small number of negative responses expressing concern at the idea. Since then, both The Guide Dogs for the Blind and the Berkshire Blind Society have collected a petition against the trial asking for the traffic signals to be switched back on. Very little feedback has been received from the general public.

#### **4.3 PUBLIC COMMENTS**

The main area of concern remains crossing at the junction by blind/partially sighted people who say they cannot tell from which direction vehicles are approaching. A petition was presented to the Sub-Committee in March and this has been resubmitted more recently with additional names added. The initial response to the trial switch-off generated a few comments to the effect that drivers did not know how to use the area with examples of buses meeting within the junction. This appears to have become much more settled as time has gone on. Both drivers and pedestrians appear to have overcome the initial difference of using the junction without the lights and there is no practical evidence that road safety has been compromised in any way. An independent road safety assessment study has been carried out. This concluded that the risk of an injury (to anyone) at the junction, as a result of a collision, was low prior to the trial and remains so without the traffic signals operating.

#### **4.4 OPTIONS FOR THE FUTURE**

- To switch the lights back on at the Target junction.
- To continue with the experimental switch-off
- To remove the traffic signals and reconfigure the junction to create a "shared space" facility that caters better for blind/partially sighted people, especially across Broad Street (west).

## 4.5 OPPORTUNITIES WITHOUT THE SIGNALS

- i) Should the switch-off become permanent the traffic signal equipment would need to be removed. This would 'open up' the area and actually improve the junction for blind/partially sighted by removing clutter. However, we would not want to open up the carriageway allowing vehicles to encroach on space currently used by pedestrians. The vehicle lines should be maintained and the narrow single-file section on the St Mary's Butts side of the junction needs to remain. It may be possible to create narrow single-file sections on the Broad Street (west) and West Street approaches where specific facilities for blind/partially sighted could be created.
  - ii) On the Broad Street (west) side of the junction the raised section of the carriageway extends the greatest distance from the centre of the junction at around 30m. This approach is also a significant bus stop for many services. This west side of the junction may provide an opportunity to consider a specific route for disabled pedestrians. By being further away from the centre of the junction vehicles are able to fully straighten within this section when heading west. By the time that vehicles reach this point their direction of travel is much easier to determine for blind/partially sighted users if this is deemed an issue. Consequently there may be a number of possibilities to improve the route for pedestrians at this point.
  - iii) The narrow carriageway section on the St Mary's Butts side of the junction should remain single file for vehicles and this potentially completes a defined route for blind/partially sighted users into Broad Street (east).
  - iv) There is also a need to consider improving the visibility for bus drivers when turning from West Street towards Broad Street Mall and Oxford Road. With a relatively simple alteration to the junction or parking without the traffic signals in place, visibility can be improved significantly.
- 4.6 Removal of the traffic signals and current guard rail will enable a better use of the space. The opportunity exists to use this space for something else. Cycle parking currently exists around the junction and this could be enhanced within the 'reclaimed' space. The 'target' itself is a feature that has existed for some time. The large granite sets that form the rings are not very practical (becoming loose and unstable) which has led to a legacy of maintenance problems. These sets should be removed but the character of the junction should be maintained.
- 4.7 Based on what we have learnt so far from feedback, which has mainly been from pedestrians, the predominant concern is how blind/partially sighted users negotiate the junction. Aside from the petition we have received less than ten written comments expressing concern to the trial switch-off of the traffic signals. By comparison, we received around twenty written responses to the Jacksons Corner traffic signal removal. Reading Taxi Association has expressed support for the trial and ultimately have encouraged us to consider the

permanent removal of the traffic signals. The town centre businesses have so far been silent.

- 4.8 Reading Buses report that there has been a positive impact on operational performance as a result of the switch-off of the traffic lights at the St Mary's Butts/Oxford Road junction. Approximately 1,400 bus trips use that junction each weekday, carrying around 40,000 passengers a day. The majority of those with bus journeys starting and/or finishing in the central area need to travel through the junction in one or both directions of travel.

Initial analysis has confirmed that the company is seeing shorter journey times on most routes using the junction, (between 30 and 60 seconds per trip) leading to a 39% decrease in late-running buses on the one corridor that has been examined in more detail.

There are also improvements to local air quality. Reading Buses has estimated that the change has eliminated a cumulative 12 hours of bus idling each weekday with commensurate reductions in particulate and nitrous oxides emissions.

#### **4.9 CONCLUSION**

The switch-off has proved that pedestrians and vehicles can safely use this junction without the aid of traffic signals. However, the concerns from blind/partially sighted users need be considered if the traffic signals are permanently removed. Removal of the traffic signals opens up the junction, creating opportunities to enhance the "shared space" area, provide a dedicated route for blind/partially sighted users, improve cycle parking and meet the objectives of improved road safety and public transport journey times.

- 5 Drawing: TC/target concepts/01 gives an idea of some of the options for consideration as explained in 4.5

#### **6 CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS**

- 6.1 This proposal supports the aims and objectives of the Local Transport Plan and contributes to the Council's strategic aims, as set out below:

- To develop Reading as a Green City with a sustainable environment and economy at the heart of the Thames Valley
- To promote equality, social inclusion and a safe and healthy environment for all

#### **7. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INFORMATION**

- 7.1 None at this time

#### **8. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 8.1 None arising from this report.

## **9. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

9.1 In addition to the Human Rights Act 1998 the Council is required to comply with the Equalities Act 2010. Section 149 of the Equalities Act 2010 requires the Council to have due regard to the need to:

- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
- advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
- foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

9.2 An independent road safety assessment study has been carried out.

## **10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

10.1 Funding would need to be identified from transport budgets to take any scheme forward.

## **11. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

11.1 TM Sub March 2015

# Target Junction opportunities

