

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT BY DIRECTOR OF ENVIRONMENT & NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

TO:	TRAFFIC MANAGEMENT SUB-COMMITTEE		
DATE:	16 SEPTEMBER 2015	AGENDA ITEM:	10
TITLE:	TARGET JUNCTION TRIAL TRAFFIC SIGNAL SWITCH-OFF - UPDATE (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 junction of Broad Street with St Mary's Butts and West Street. This report sets out the response to the trial so far and feedback from the Access & Disabilities Forum and other individuals. The Access & Disabilities Forum held a specific town centre/target junction workshop on 15th July 2015.

2. RECOMMENDED ACTION

- 2.1 The Sub-committee is asked to note the report.
- 2.2 That the Sub-committee consider the feedback from the Access & Disabilities Forum and agree that the junction control by traffic signals can be permanently removed.
- 2.3 That subject to agreeing to remove the junction control by traffic signals that the following alterations are carried out:
- 2.3.1 A formal traffic signal controlled pedestrian crossing is provided on the western side of the junction in front of the main entrance to Broad Street Mall.
- 2.3.2 De-cluttering of the junction is carried out to improve sightlines (this is mainly through the removal of the traffic signal equipment).
- 2.3.3 Waiting restrictions are reviewed on the two approaches to the junction on St Marys Butts and West Street to improve visibility for both pedestrians and drivers.

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 It was agreed at Traffic Management Sub-committee in June that the traffic signals at the target junction remain switched-off and consultation through the Access & Disabilities Forum would take place. Attendance at the Access & Disabilities Forum by a transport officer to present/discuss the trial switch-off took place on 25th June 2015. In response to the decision taken by Traffic Management Sub-Committee in June a specific town centre/target junction workshop with the Access & Disabilities Forum was held on 15th July 2015.

5. The Access & Disabilities Forum Workshop 15th July 2015

- 5.1 The workshop held on 15th July 2015 was based on allowing people to experience the junction and then spending time discussing specific points and issues raised. During the site visit various individuals took the opportunity to cross and re-cross at the junction explaining their specific needs and pointing out potential issues for improvement. A discussion session followed immediately after the site visit at the Civic Offices.

5.2 The site visit

During the site visit it was acknowledged that crossing the road on the St Marys Butts (southern) side of the junction is the easiest to negotiate. This part of the junction is narrowed with vehicles only able to pass through in single file. Vehicle speeds are very low through the junction generally but particularly so on this southern approach.

The whole junction is raised so that the footways are at the same level as the carriageway. On the St Marys Butts approach the ramp up onto the raised carriageway is made up of rows of granite stone. This creates a noticeable noise when particularly quiet vehicles approach the pedestrian crossing area. It was commented on that this helped warn blind pedestrians of a slow moving quiet vehicle such as the most modern buses.

When standing at this point to cross the road to and from the pedestrianized part of Broad Street the traffic signal equipment restricts the view for pedestrians. Should the traffic signals be permanently removed the visibility would obviously improve. During the site visit a bullion vehicle made a delivery within St Marys Butts by stopping right up against the kerb build out at the edge of the junction. With the vehicle stopped at this point it made it harder for pedestrians to see buses pulling away from the bus stops within St Marys Butts and starting off towards the junction. This, in itself, does not increase the risk to pedestrians as the buses move so slowly and many drivers stop to allow pedestrians to cross. However, for those who take longer to cross the road being able to see vehicles as far away as possible provides increased comfort and reduces worry. With the bullion vehicle parked at this specific point, for some within the group, it raised their anxiety when crossing the

road. Certain vehicles are exempt from waiting restrictions and bullion vehicles can stop at this point. A review of restrictions that allow deliveries may be necessary longer term should the traffic signals be removed.

Most of the site visit was spent at the St Marys Butts side of the junction and by and large improvements can be made negating the need for traffic signals at this point.

5.3 The workshop session

In the subsequent workshop session the initial part of the meeting covered the reasons behind the trail switch-off. Many still felt uncomfortable that the sole reason was to improve bus journey times. Once the history of the junction, problems and complaints received (with the signals on) explained the group became increasingly engaging. The discussion then became much more positive and accepting that there are relatively long periods without vehicles moving through the junction creating time to safely cross the road. The discussion then turned to what the group would like to see if the decision is made to remove the traffic signals. It was accepted that removal of the traffic signal poles would 'open up' the junction and remove some of the cluttered feel and visibility restrictions. The granite ramp on the St Marys Butts side was noted again for creating a noise and visibly slowing drivers. The desire of the group was that this should be repeated on all approaches to the pedestrian crossing points. It is only the western side of the junction, outside the main entrance of Broad Street Mall (BSM), where this is missing.

Whilst it was generally accepted that crossing the road at the narrowest St Marys Butts side of the junction was not much of a problem the other two approaches are perceived to be more challenging. The discussion then focused on creating a route from the busy bus stops at the western side of the junction across to the main entrance of BSM. At this side of the junction it would be possible to retain a formal crossing point. This creates a route to BSM and then onto the pedestrianized part of Broad Street via the narrower crossing point across St Marys Butts.

During the final wrap-up session, whilst there remained one or two individuals who insisted that the traffic signals should be switched on; the consensus was that the traffic signals could be removed with the additional features discussed.

The two Access & Disabilities meetings (19th March and 25th June) and the workshop session was attended by representatives from:

- Berkshire County Blind Society
- Guide Dogs for the Blind
- Enrych Berkshire
- MS Society Berkshire
- MS Therapy Centre, Reading
- Reading Association for the Blind
- Reading Arthritis Care/Crossroads
- Chain Action & Stroke Association
- Healthwatch Reading
- Berkshire PHAB

As the forum is a public meeting it is open to anyone who is interested in access and disability issues. Consequently the meetings are regularly attended by a variety of individuals for their own interest. At both the site visit and workshop session held on the 15th July there were a number of other individuals who attended for their own personal interest and to express their opinion.

- 5.4 There are further individual site meetings arranged most notably with Guide Dogs for the Blind.

6. Conclusions drawn from the Access & Disabilities Workshop

- 6.1 With a formal pedestrian crossing across the western side of the junction, thus providing a specific route for those that would prefer the protection of such a facility, the expectations of the Access & Disabilities group would be largely met. The removal of the traffic signal infrastructure would de-clutter the junction and improve sight lines for all users. Consideration for granite paving on the western side of the junction may not be necessary as this is where the formal crossing would be introduced. We would still need to consider altering the West Street approach as identified in the previous report to improve visibility for drivers. This is likely to involve the removal of parking to ensure vehicles are positioned so to be able to see across the junction.

7. Legal Challenge

- 7.1 Unity Law are challenging share space schemes promoted by various local highway authorities across the country. Our response has been that as we have provided the opportunity for people to respond to the trial and that there is no case to answer in relation to the Equality Act 2010. No further correspondence has been received from Unity Law at the time of writing this report.

8 Conclusion

- 8.1 The switch-off has shown that pedestrians and vehicles can safely use this junction without the aid of the junction controls. Concerns from disabled people, particularly blind and partially sighted users, would be met by creating a dedicated route across the western and southern approaches to the junction. This would be met through the installation of a formal pedestrian crossing on the western side of the junction as previously explained. We will use the existing traffic signal infrastructure to provide the new pedestrian crossing.

9 CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS

- 9.1 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

10. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INFORMATION

10.1 Various representations have been made directly to us. We have used the Access & Disabilities Forum to engage with interested parties and to consider their specific needs.

11. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

11.1 The removal of traffic signals is a matter for local highway authorities as there is no legal requirement to provide traffic signals. However, traffic signals provide help for pedestrians whether they have specific facilities or not. The Equality Act 2010 requires us to complete an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) should the decision be made to remove the traffic signals permanently.

12. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

12.1 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.

12.2 In respect of the Equalities Act 2010, the Access & Disabilities Forum workshop held on the 15th July and other engagement work is largely in response to our duty under the Act. This exercise and the conclusions of this report will form the basis of the EIA.

13. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

13.1 Funding would need to be identified from transport budgets to take any scheme forward. To remove the traffic signal infrastructure and create a new formal crossing with the old equipment on the western side only will require an estimated £40K.

14. BACKGROUND PAPERS

14.1 TM Sub-committee March and June 2015