

## READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

### REPORT BY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF ECONOMIC GROWTH AND NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

<b>TO:</b>	<b>STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT, PLANNING AND TRANSPORT COMMITTEE</b>		
<b>DATE:</b>	<b>16 MARCH 2020</b>	<b>AGENDA ITEM:</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>TITLE:</b>	<b>MAJOR TRANSPORT SCHEMES UPDATE</b>		
<b>LEAD COUNCILLOR:</b>	<b>TONY PAGE</b>	<b>PORTFOLIO:</b>	<b>STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT, PLANNING AND TRANSPORT</b>
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#### 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 This report provides an update on key progress and milestones associated with the delivery of the current programme of major transport projects in Reading, including:

- Reading Station Area Redevelopment
- South Reading Mass Rapid Transit
- Thames Valley Park Park & Ride
- Reading Green Park Station
- Reading West Station Upgrade
- National Cycle Network Route 422

1.2 The report also provides an update on funding opportunities for future schemes which are currently unfunded.

#### 2. RECOMMENDED ACTION

2.1 That the Committee notes progress with delivery of the programme of major transport schemes as set out within the report.

2.2 That the Committee notes progress with developing possible future schemes, including the submission of funding bids as set out in paras 4.24 to 4.32 of this report.

### 3. POLICY CONTEXT

- 3.1 The Council's Corporate Plan supports the delivery of new transport infrastructure in order to manage levels of congestion, improve air quality and reduce carbon emissions, whilst accommodating the significant levels of planned growth. The Council's approved Capital Programme provides capital funding of over £40m for the projects listed in this report. Funding is provided from grants received from the Local Enterprise Partnership and Central Government, developer contributions, investment from Network Rail and Great Western Railway (GWR), and Council borrowing.
- 3.2 The Council's current Local Transport Plan for the period 2011-26 was adopted by Full Council in March 2011, setting the policy for promoting safe and sustainable travel within, to and from the Borough. However, the majority of schemes within the current strategy have either been delivered or are in the process of being delivered, therefore a new draft strategy has been developed to put the Council in the best possible position to secure external investment in Reading.
- 3.3 An initial consultation on the principles to underpin the new transport strategy was undertaken last summer and this Committee is being asked to approve the new draft strategy for statutory consultation under a separate agenda item to this meeting. The strategy reflects that fact that transport is a vital element of achieving wider Council policy objectives relating to air quality, climate change, health and wellbeing, equality for all and enabling sustainable and inclusive economic growth and housing delivery.
- 3.4 The new strategy has been developed to help achieve wider objectives including the Reading 2050 Vision, Climate Emergency which was declared in February 2019 and improved air quality. It is heavily focused on addressing these wider challenges through a package of solutions to both provide realistic sustainable alternatives to the private car, alongside measures to manage demand to improve air quality and congestion. The new strategy has been aligned with other Council strategies including the new Local Plan and draft Climate Emergency Strategy.

### 4. THE PROPOSAL

#### Major Transport Scheme Programme

#### Reading Station Area Redevelopment

- 4.1 Reading Station has been transformed in recent years through the Network Rail led £850m area redevelopment scheme. The final element of this scheme was delivered in April 2019 with the opening of the Cow Lane scheme, unlocking this historic bottle neck by providing two lanes for traffic alongside a continuous shared path for pedestrians and cyclists. To complement the new highway arrangements at Cow Lane the Council has recently implemented a reduced speed limit of 30mph on Cow Lane and Portman Road, and is developing a series of public transport, walking and cycling enhancements for the Oxford Road corridor.
- 4.2 The multi-modal interchanges at Reading Station have also undergone significant redevelopment and the Council has secured funding of £36,000 from GWR's Customer and Communities Improvement Fund for the delivery of further wayfinding and cycle parking security improvements. This includes the installation of additional CCTV cameras within the cycle parking hub at the northern interchange, and new high-quality pedestrian wayfinding units to the north and south of the station. These units have been designed to complement the soon to be upgraded signage within the station and the significant amount of pedestrian signage which has been installed throughout the town as part of the Abbey Quarter project.
- 4.3 The CCTV cameras are due to be installed by early summer and will be connected to the central CCTV facility overseen by the Council and Thames Valley Police. The design of the wayfinding units is currently being finalised and they will be manufactured in March, with installation scheduled by our in-house Highways team also in early summer.

#### South Reading Mass Rapid Transit (Phases 1-4)

- 4.4 The overall vision for the South Reading Mass Rapid Transit (MRT) scheme is a dedicated fast-track public transport priority route on the A33 growth corridor, between Mere oak Park & Ride and Reading town centre. The current scheme is a series of bus priority measures being delivered in phases as funding is secured, which in the future has the potential to become a guided-bus, tram or autonomous shared vehicle system.
- 4.5 Phases 1 and 2 of the scheme were granted full funding approval from the Berkshire Local Transport Body (BLTB) in November 2015; and scheme and spend approval by Policy Committee in April 2016. The scheme is now complete with the following sections of bus priority delivered:
- Outbound bus lane between the A33 junction with Imperial Way and the existing bus priority provided through M4 Junction 11.
  - Outbound bus lanes between the A33 junctions with Lindisfarne Way (Kennet Island) and Imperial Way.
  - Inbound bus lane on the A33 between Imperial Way and South Oak Way.

- 4.6 Phases 3 and 4 of the scheme were granted full financial approval by the BLTB in November 2017, and scheme and spend approval by Policy Committee in January 2018. Construction commenced in March 2018 and the latest position on each section of the scheme is set out below:
- Extension of the inbound bus lane on Bridge Street - complete.
  - Outbound bus lane on London Street - complete.
  - Outbound bus lane on the A33 approach to Rose Kiln Lane - complete.
  - Outbound bus lane on the A33 between Rose Kiln Lane and Lindisfarne Way (Kennet Island) - construction works to commence spring 2020.
  - Upgrade of the traffic signals to a MOVA method of control at a number of junctions on the MRT route including the A33 Bennet Road gyratory - construction works scheduled for summer 2020.
  - Inbound bus lane parallel to Reading International Business Park - construction works scheduled for summer 2020.
  - Two new bus stops near Kennet Island (northbound) and at Little Lea (southbound) - construction works scheduled for summer 2020.

#### Thames Valley Park Park & Ride

- 4.7 Thames Valley Park Park & Ride is a new park & ride facility off the A3290 to the east of Reading, in close proximity to Thames Valley Park business park, which forms part of our planned comprehensive network of park & ride facilities for the urban area. The scheme is being led by Wokingham Borough Council and was granted full financial approval by the BLTB in July 2017.
- 4.8 A public consultation on the scheme proposals was undertaken during November 2015 and planning permission was granted by Wokingham Borough Council in November 2016. This planning consent was subsequently varied through a Section 73 application in October 2018 to reflect the updated design for the scheme, which includes planting in a 'living wall'.
- 4.9 Wokingham has appointed a contractor to deliver the scheme and construction work commenced on-site in February 2018. The latest programme from Wokingham is for the facility to be operational from April 2020.

#### Reading Green Park Station

- 4.10 Reading Green Park Station is a proposed new railway station on the Reading to Basingstoke line. The station and multi-modal interchange will significantly improve accessibility and connectivity to this area of south Reading which has large-scale development proposed including the expansion of Green Park business park, Green Park Village residential development and the Royal Elm Park mixed use development.

- 4.11 The scheme was granted financial approval by the BLTB in November 2014; and scheme and spend approval by Policy Committee in September 2017. Concept designs for the station were produced by Network Rail and planning permission granted in 2015, with funding for the scheme secured from the Local Growth Fund (£9.15m), Section 106 developer contributions (£5.6m) and the New Station's Fund 2 (£2.3m)
- 4.12 Balfour Beatty has been appointed to undertake the detailed design and construction of the station. Design work for the multi-modal interchange and surface level car park is complete and a significant proportion of the interchange works are also now complete. Detailed design work for the station is being progressed in parallel with the construction of the interchange..
- 4.13 The scheme is being progressed in partnership with Network Rail and Great Western Railway (GWR), who will ultimately own and operate the station respectively. The Council has worked with these partners to address budget pressures resulting from design changes to the station and a review of the delivery programme. An additional £2.477m funding has been secured from the New Stations Fund and £550k from the Local Growth Fund to ensure we can provide the best possible facilities for passengers from station opening. This will result in the overall budget for the station increasing to £20.077m but as a result of the support from the rail industry and the Local Enterprise Partnership, there is no further Council funding required above the £5.6m already committed by the Council and secured from developer contributions.
- 4.14 The next step for this project is to finalise the detailed designs for the station and commence construction of the station itself which is scheduled to commence in March 2020. As a result of the rail industry led design changes detailed in 4.13 above, the indicative programme for completion of the station construction works has been updated to winter 2020. Once complete the station will go through a period of testing before its official opening and public use. The Council will work with Network Rail and GWR to ensure that the station is open as soon as possible after its completion.

#### Reading West Station Upgrade

- 4.15 The Council, in partnership with GWR and Network Rail, has produced plans for improved passenger facilities at Reading West Station which have been designed to transform the station and interchange environment. These plans include a new station entrance on the Oxford Road which include highway alterations and interchange improvements, increased cycle parking, improvements within the station itself such as enhanced lighting and CCTV coverage, and enhancements to the entrance at Tilehurst Road.
- 4.16 The scheme was granted funding approval by the BLTB in November 2019 with £3.1m funding from the Local Growth Fund (LGF) and £200,000 Section

106 developer funding secured by the Council through the planning process. In addition, the overall scheme includes works implemented by Network Rail to the value of £940,000 to provide a new stepped access from the town centre side of the Oxford Road to the outbound platform (for services towards Basingstoke) following removal of the internal footbridge connecting the two platforms. The works were successfully delivered in 2019 as part of Network Rail's wider programme of electrification works for the railway line between Southcote Junction and Newbury and therefore this element of the project has been delivered.

- 4.17 Detailed designs for the station, interchange and highway enhancements are currently being prepared in partnership with GWR, and pre-application advice from the Council's Planning department is being undertaken with a planning application due to be submitted this spring. A Funding Agreement is being developed with GWR to apportion the LGF funding between the station works which are being managed by GWR and the interchange and highway elements of the scheme which are being managed by the Council.
- 4.18 The scheme will include passive provision for accessibility enhancements within the designs for the station enhancements, however Network Rail's requirement for a full rebuild of the platforms prior to any accessibility enhancements being implemented means delivery of these elements is not currently affordable within the funding envelope for the current scheme. Therefore, the Council will continue to seek opportunities to secure funding for these elements of the overall Masterplan vision for the station.

#### NCN (National Cycle Network) Route 422

- 4.19 National Cycle Network (NCN) Route 422 is a new cross-Berkshire cycle route between Newbury and Ascot. The route will provide an enhanced east-west cycle facility through Reading, linking to existing cycle routes to the north and south of the borough. The scheme was granted full funding approval by the BLTB in November 2015 and the elements within Reading are being delivered in phases as set out below.
- 4.20 Phase 1 of the scheme was granted scheme and spend approval by Policy Committee in January 2017. It includes the provision of a shared path on the northern side of the Bath Road between the Borough boundary and Berkeley Avenue, with the majority of construction completed in July 2017. The remaining element of this phase involves widening the footway and associated improvements between the junctions with New Lane Hill and Greenwood Road. These works have been complicated by the presence of a poorly maintained, privately-owned retaining wall at the edge of the footway on the Bath Road near Greenwood Road for which an engineering solution is currently being finalised.
- 4.21 Phase 2 of the scheme was granted scheme and spend approval at Policy Committee in September 2017. It includes the provision of a route from Bath

Road/Berkeley Avenue through the town centre to east Reading, including the installation of two tiger crossings (which combines a pedestrian zebra with a crossing for people on bikes) on Duke Street and Yield Hall Place, imprinting at key crossing points and on-carriageway cycle facilities along Berkeley Avenue, improved signage along the route including through the Oracle shopping centre, and a contraflow cycle facility on Kennet Side. The majority of works for this phase are now complete, with remaining lining and signage to be completed.

- 4.22 Phase 3 of the scheme was granted scheme and spend approval by the Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport Committee in November 2018. It builds on previous works delivered as part of the Local Sustainable Transport Fund (LSTF) programme by enhancing cycle facilities along Wokingham Road from Cemetery Junction to Three Tuns. Works commenced in April 2019 including improved pedestrian and cycle crossing facilities at side road junctions and between Cemetery Junction and Palmer Park Avenue, and implementation of a tiger crossing facility outside the entrance to Palmer Park. Recommendations from the road safety audit undertaken for the tiger crossing in summer 2019 have been implemented, including the application of coloured anti-skid on the approaches to the crossing. On-carriageway cycle facilities were delivered in tandem with the Council's annual resurfacing programme, with remaining signage works and raised tables to be implemented.
- 4.23 The next step for this scheme is to complete the remaining works as set out above for the full route within Reading to be opened, which will link with the elements outside the borough currently being delivered by Wokingham and West Berkshire Councils.

### **Future Funding Opportunities & Unfunded Schemes**

#### **Reading Station Interchange Enhancements**

- 4.24 GWR launched a further round of the Customer and Communities Improvement Fund in summer 2019, for which the Council submitted bids to fund cycle parking improvements at the south-east interchange and access improvements at the southern interchange, which was supported by the Access and Disabilities Working Group and Reading Association for the Blind. The accessibility bid seeks to provide directional tactile paving so people who are blind or visually impaired can navigate the public square more easily, and the installation of contrasting strips on street furniture to reduce hazards. It is not currently known when an announcement will be made by GWR regarding the successful bids.

#### **South Reading Mass Rapid Transit (Future Phases)**

- 4.25 As set out in the report above, the South Reading MRT scheme is being delivered in phases as funding is secured, with phases 3 and 4 currently

being delivered. The Council has submitted a bid to the DfT Pinch Point Fund for phases 5 and 6 of the scheme, to the value of £12m in line with the Council's approved Capital Programme. The chances of this bid being successful are limited due to the fact that the scheme is located on the proposed Major Road Network (MRN) and the DfT guidance was clear that schemes on the MRN were not the focus of this funding opportunity, therefore we will continue to seek other opportunities to secure funding for this scheme as they arise.

### Third Thames Crossing East of Reading

- 4.26 A third vehicular crossing over the River Thames is a longstanding element of Reading's transport strategy to improve travel options in the wider area, and to help relieve traffic congestion in Reading, Sonning and Henley. The Cross Thames Travel Group has been established to progress the scheme, which is currently led by Wokingham Borough Council in partnership with Reading Borough Council, South Oxfordshire District Council, Oxfordshire County Council, Thames Valley Berkshire LEP and Oxfordshire LEP.
- 4.27 Preparation of the Outline Strategic Business Case for the scheme was completed in September 2017. The business case shows there is a strong case for a two-lane traffic bridge in this location, with the full documentation available on Wokingham Borough Council's website here - <http://www.wokingham.gov.uk/parking-road-works-and-transport/transport-and-roads-guidance-and-plans/>.
- 4.28 A high-level feasibility study has been undertaken to investigate the buildability, outline costs and programme for constructing a bridge in line with the recommendations set out in the Outline Strategic Business Case. This work was completed in October 2019 which confirms construction of a river crossing in the proposed location would be feasible and includes high-level cost and programme information which will be used to feed into future work for the scheme.
- 4.29 The scheme has been nominated for prioritisation by TfSE for possible funding through the DfT's Large Local Major Schemes programme. TfSE ranked the scheme as the second highest priority scheme of this magnitude in the South East region and has subsequently submitted the proposal to the DfT for consideration for funding.
- 4.30 The next MP summit meeting to review progress on the scheme has been called by the MPs for Reading East and Henley Constituencies at the end of March 2020. We will continue to work with officers from each authority through the Cross Thames Travel Group to progress the scheme and further updates will be provided at the appropriate time.



- 4.31 The draft version of the Reading Transport Strategy 2036 for statutory consultation includes a comprehensive programme of schemes and initiatives aligned to the overall strategy vision. This programme includes the schemes set out in this report alongside a programme of new schemes, ranging from major capital schemes such as the North Reading Orbital Route, radical improvements to the public transport, walking and cycle networks and a programme of communication, engagement and training initiatives.
- 4.32 All of the new schemes and initiatives included within the draft strategy are currently unfunded. It will therefore be vital that these schemes are developed to a point at which the Council is in the best possible position to secure external funding to deliver these schemes and initiatives to ensure the overall vision and objectives of the strategy are ultimately achieved, including responding to the Climate Emergency.

## **5. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS**

- 5.1 The delivery of the projects outlined in this report help to deliver the following service priorities in the Council's Corporate Plan 'Shaping Reading's Future: 2018 -2021':
- Securing the economic success of Reading and provision of job opportunities.
  - Keeping Reading's environment clean, green and safe.
  - Promoting health, education, culture & wellbeing.

## **6. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INFORMATION**

- 6.1 The projects have and will be communicated to the local community through public exhibitions and Council meetings.
- 6.2 Statutory consultation will be conducted in accordance with appropriate legislation. Notices will be advertised in the local printed newspaper and will be erected on lamp columns within the affected area.

## **7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1 The creation of - and changes to existing - Traffic Regulation Orders will require advertisement and consultation, under the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 and in accordance with the Local Authorities Traffic Orders (Procedure) (England and Wales) Regulations 1996. These procedures have been and will continue to be completed at the relevant time.

## **8. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

- 8.1 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.
- 8.2 The Council, and where appropriate partner delivery organisations, have carried out an equality impact assessment scoping exercise on all of the projects included within the current capital programme.

## **9. ENVIRONMENTAL AND CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS**

- 9.1 Our transport strategy is focused on encouraging the use of sustainable transport, walking and cycling as attractive alternatives to the private car. This includes managing congestion and improving air quality by providing a more efficient network and suitable alternatives for vehicular traffic, which will enable existing highway capacity to be reallocated for the use of sustainable modes. The delivery of the schemes as set out within this report form part of this overall strategy, which has achieved considerable success in recent years including bus usage in Reading being the third highest in the country outside of London, having increased by 23% since 2010, and around 35% of trips into Reading town centre being made by pedestrians and cyclists.
- 9.2 Transport is the biggest greenhouse gas emitting sector in the UK accounting for around 27% of total emissions. Significant investment in sustainable transport solutions, including the schemes set out within this report, are therefore vital in order to respond to the Climate Crisis declared by the Council in February 2019 and to help achieve our target of a carbon neutral Reading by 2030.

## **10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 10.1 All schemes included in the current programme being delivered by the Council are included in the Council's Capital Programme. This sets out the funding sources and funding profile for each scheme.

## **11. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- 11.1 Major Transport Scheme Update Reports to Strategic, Environment, Planning and Transport Committee from 2015 onwards.