

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT BY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF ECONOMIC GROWTH AND NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

TO:	POLICY COMMITTEE		
DATE:	18 MAY 2020		
TITLE:	REALLOCATION OF ROAD SPACE - READING'S ACTIVE TRAVEL PROPOSALS		
LEAD COUNCILLOR:	COUNCILLOR PAGE	PORTFOLIO:	STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT, PLANNING & TRANSPORT
SERVICE:	PLANNING, TRANSPORT AND REGULATORY SERVICES	WARDS:	BOROUGHWIDE
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In accordance with Section 100B (4)(b) of the Local Government Act 1972, the Chair has agreed to allow this item to be considered as a matter of urgency to respond promptly to recent Government additional statutory guidance on the reallocation of road space in order to support local authorities to manage their road networks in response to the coronavirus outbreak. As such there is an expectation that we should consider the types of measures set out in the report to reallocate road space to encourage active travel and to enable social distancing, and implement appropriate schemes as swiftly as possible. The schemes have been prepared to address the key government guidance in the following sequence - i) short term - reallocating road space to walking and cycling to enable mobility whilst maintaining social distancing and reflecting the necessary restrictions on public transport (both in terms of service frequency and occupancy) (ii) medium-long term - reallocating road space from private transport to public transport and active travel to meet public health, air quality and carbon objectives. Some schemes may achieve both and current circumstances present a unique opportunity to take them forward. Therefore, it is important to consider this report at the earliest opportunity and not delay it unnecessarily until the next available meeting.

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 To seek scheme and spend approval for a number of highway schemes which reallocate road space to pedestrian and cycle space in response to the need to support sustainable transport modes during the Coronavirus pandemic and potentially beyond.
- 1.2 The Coronavirus pandemic has had, and continues to have, a significant impact on how residents and businesses operate. Social distancing requirements, in place to keep people safe, are likely to be in place for some time. The Government has also advised people to avoid public transport, where possible, as people begin to return to work and school. The Council needs to respond swiftly to changing travel demands by increasing active travel opportunities which increase walking and cycling. The Council has long-standing policy objectives to increasing active travel in any case, and the current low levels of traffic provide potentially unique opportunities to make a step change in the adoption of healthier and more sustainable travel choices.

- 1.3 While the Government has issued guidance and is allocating funding to active travel proposals the details have yet to emerge. The report sets out an initial tranche of schemes for implementation including proposals for Gosbrook Road, Reading Bridge and Sidmouth Street. Further projects are also being considered with the hope that they can be brought forward for implementation subject to Government funding.
- 1.4 It is recommended to use the Council's approved Capital Programme funding (for transport projects) to commence initial delivery of these proposed schemes. Given the limitations of the Capital Programme, additional active travel schemes would need to be funded from the Government's Active Travel fund.
- 1.5 Appendix 1 - Location plan showing project areas

2 RECOMMENDED ACTION

2.1 To grant scheme and spend approval for the following projects:

Short Term projects

- a) Gosbrook Road
- b) Sidmouth Street
- c) Reading Bridge
- d) Cycle lanes on Oxford Road
- e) Whitley Street Local Centre
- f) Southampton Street / Silver Street
- g) Redlands Road

2.2 Subject to Government funding as part of the £250m active travel package, to grant delegated authority for scheme and spend approval to the Executive Director for Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services in consultation with Leader, Lead Member for Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport and Chair of the Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport Committee, to approve further schemes set out in this report:

Medium Term projects

- h) Blagrove Street
- i) Basingstoke Road
- j) London Road
- k) 20mph speed limit review

Long Term projects

- l) Scheme from the Centre to East Reading through a joined-up approach to the provision of sustainable transport facilities on Kings Road and London Road.
- m) Enhancements in West Reading including on Bath Road and further opportunities along the Oxford Road to deliver the new sections of bus lane as a part of the agreed corridor study and enhance and complement the current scheme.
- n) Opportunities in North Reading, including improved access to Christchurch Bridge alongside walking and cycling enhancements in Caversham local centre and on Caversham Bridge.
- o) Progression of measures in South Reading including on Basingstoke Road as referenced above, Shinfield Road and the A33 public transport scheme.
- p) Enhancements to walking and cycling routes to/from and through the town centre alongside improving the quality of the urban realm

- 2.3 To require a further report to a future Traffic Management Sub Committee/Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport Committee on additional active travel initiatives in due course noting the criteria set out in this report.
- 2.4 To require a further report to Policy Committee on the funding of these schemes, grant applications and possible amendments to the Capital Programme as soon as further details from Government are published.
- 2.5 To request officers to bid for all funding opportunities in order to support this initiative.

3.0 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 economic growth. The Council's approved Capital Programme provides capital funding of over £40m for key infrastructure projects. 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 Consultation on the Council's new Local Transport Plan (LTP) has commenced. The new strategy has been developed to help achieve wider objectives including the Reading 2050 Vision, the 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.
- 3.3 The Council has agreed a Strategic Framework (March 2020) which sets out the Council's key priorities including support for business and the economy. The proposals set out in this report support accessibility for all by providing an improved travel choice to support the long term recovery of Reading.

4.0 BACKGROUND

- 4.1 The coronavirus pandemic, alongside the Climate Emergency, have dramatically enhanced the focus on enabling greater levels of active travel through the provision of walking and cycling facilities. The Government has published additional statutory guidance on the reallocation of road space in order to support local authorities to manage their road networks in response to the coronavirus outbreak. The guidance does not replace previously published guidance but provides additional advice in order to respond to the Covid 19 situation.
- 4.2 The guidance is focused on local authority (LA) areas with high levels of public transport use. Such LA's should take measures to reallocate road space for people walking and cycling, both to encourage active travel and to enable social distancing with implementation as swiftly as possible and in any event within 'weeks'. This is therefore particularly relevant to Reading which has the third highest bus usage in the UK outside of London.
- 4.3 Measures suggested by Government include:

- Installing ‘pop-up’ cycle facilities with a minimum level of physical separation from volume traffic
 - Using cones and barriers: to widen footways along lengths of road, particularly outside shops and transport hubs and bus stops
 - Encouraging walking and cycling to school, for example through the introduction of more ‘school streets’
 - Reducing speed limits: 20mph speed limits
 - Introducing pedestrian and cycle zones
 - Closing roads to motor traffic, for example by using planters or large barriers.
 - Providing additional cycle parking facilities at key locations
 - Changes to junction design to accommodate more cyclists
 - ‘Whole-route’ approaches to create corridors for buses, cycles
 - Identifying and bringing forward permanent schemes already planned
- 4.4 The Government states that these measures can be introduced temporarily, either in isolation or as a combined package of measures. Some interventions, including new lightly-segregated cycle lanes, will not require Traffic Regulation Orders (TROs). Others will require TROs, of which there are different types. The Government has published temporary guidance on making TRO’s and guidance related to signage during the coronavirus pandemic.
- 4.5 Authorities should monitor and evaluate any temporary measures they install, with a view to making them permanent, and embedding a long-term shift to active travel as we move from restart to recovery.
- 4.6 The Government has also announced a £2 billion package to support cycling and walking. A £250 million emergency active travel fund has been made available to help encourage more people to choose alternatives to public transport when they need to travel. This contributes to making healthier habits easier and helping make sure the road, bus and rail networks are ready to respond to future increases in demand. No specific details of this funding have been published at the time of writing this report but it is expected that access to these funds would provide the capital needed to implement these and future projects. Funding for the first tranche of projects set out in this report will come from current allocations set out in the approved capital programme.
- 4.7 Whilst in lockdown, people’s mobility has been restricted and there has been a significant fall in car-based traffic. Our own monitoring has seen traffic levels fall to around 35% of the typical level of vehicle use. Conversely there appears to have been increased walking and cycling particularly within local areas. As we recover from lockdown it is unclear how people will continue to travel. Recovery is expected to take some time therefore it is not anticipated that traffic will return to pre-Covid-19 levels.

Legal Framework for Traffic and other Orders

- 4.8 Some interventions, including new lightly-segregated cycle lanes, will not require Traffic Regulation Orders (TROs). Others will require TROs, of which there are different types. The main ones are:
- Permanent: this process includes prior consultation on the proposed scheme design, a 21-day notice period for statutory consultees and others who can log objections; there can be a public inquiry in some circumstances.
 - Experimental: these are used to trial schemes that may then be made permanent. Authorities may put in place monitoring arrangements, and carry out ongoing consultation once the measure is built. Although the initial implementation period

can be quick, the need for extra monitoring and consultation afterwards makes them a more onerous process overall.

- Temporary: these can be in place for up to 18 months. There is a 7-day notice period prior to making the TRO and a 14-day notification requirement after it is made, plus publicity requirements. These are most suitable for putting in place temporary measures and road closures

5.0 WAY FORWARD:

5.1 As the Council and its partners develop plans and proposals in reaction to the pandemic crisis there is an urgent need to secure a number of transport improvements to make it easier and safer for pedestrians and cyclists, and to support public transport services to recover.

5.2 Such measures would support the improvements in air quality (41% mean reduction of NO₂ at Caversham Road Air Quality Monitoring Station (AQMS) and 35% reduction at Oxford Road AQMS) measured since the start of the lockdown and will contribute to meeting the Borough's target to be net carbon neutral by 2030. The risk is that distancing guidance may lead to, in the short to medium term, an increase in car use which would create a negative impact on the town's climate change ambitions and fail to capture a step change in travel patterns.

5.3 In response the following schemes are proposed:

- Gosbrook Road and Westfield Road - to make Gosbrook Road from Westfield Road to Prospect Street into one way (westbound) and Westfield Road one way (southbound) from Henley Road junction to Gosbrook Road. This is to increase walking and cycle space primarily within Gosbrook Road noting the narrowness of the footway. This would be a temporary measure (using water-filled traffic management barriers) to help with social distancing but the scheme's effectiveness would be reviewed with a view to potential longer-term changes (4.5 refers). A temporary Traffic Regulation Order (TRO) is required to make the roads one-way resulting in a short notice (local advertisement) period. There is no mechanism to object to a temporary TRO but a further statutory process will be needed should we decided to keep the roads one-way with a 21-day consultation (4.8 refers). Subject to detailed design, temporary signing and lining is estimated to be between £8K to £10K. Water filled barriers are required to support the initial entry points and no entries at the exit. The cost of water filled barriers vary significantly depending upon hire or purchase. Estimated purchase of water filled barriers to support this scheme is £6K.

Next actions and timescales: To carry out on-site surveys and complete detailed design should this be approved. From 25th May order equipment and prepare the temporary TRO for advert. Subject to availability of equipment we could be in a position to implement this change around 22nd June. We intend to use in-house resources where possible but there will be a need to use commercial suppliers for equipment.

- Sidmouth Street - to make the road one way (northbound) for all traffic and introduce a contra-flow cycle lane in the current southbound lane in order to allow increased space to support social distancing for pedestrians and/or cycle lanes. This would helpfully link to Royal Berkshire Hospital and existing cycle facilities on London Road. This would be initially be a temporary measure (using barriers) to help with social distancing but it's effectiveness would be reviewed with a view to potential longer-term changes. A temporary Traffic Regulation Order (TRO) is required to make the roads one-way resulting in a short notice (local advertisement)

period. There is no mechanism to object to a temporary TRO but a further statutory process will be needed should we decided to keep the road one-way with a 21-day consultation (4.8 refers). The cost of the signing, lining is estimated at £6k to £8K. Waterfilled barriers would be used to support the points of access to prevent drivers from driving the wrong way and this is estimated at £10K.

Next actions and timescales: To carry out on-site surveys and complete detailed design should this be approved. From 1st June order equipment and prepare the temporary TRO for advert. Subject to availability of equipment we could be in a position to implement this change around 29th June. We intend to use in-house resources where possible but there will be a need to use commercial suppliers for equipment.

- Reading Bridge - this would involve removing an inbound lane and existing hatching and remarking the highway to allow north and south bound cycle ways. This will support on road cycling to and from Caversham and create alternative routes to the Town Centre and the Station for those cyclists not wishing to utilise Christchurch Bridge at the current time. This would be implemented as a temporary measure under legalisation, however the scheme itself could be made permanent with minimal additional works as it would involve highway remarking rather than temporary barriers. No TRO is required for this even if the Council eventually decided to make the cycle lanes mandatory. The cost of re-lining Bridge Street and George Street is estimated to be between £10K and £12K.

Next actions and timescales: To carry out on-site surveys and complete detailed design should this be approved. From 25th May to order equipment and prepare the road for re-lining. Subject to contractor availability this could take place the following week.

5.4 In addition to the above major schemes, the implementation of a number of small schemes already highlighted in the current Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (which is currently being consulted on alongside the Local Transport Plan):

- Delivery of cycle lanes on Oxford Road. Works associated with the Oxford Road corridor study have been consulted upon previously and could be implemented with permanent remarking of the highway. This is similar to the changes at Reading Bridge so, subject to detailed design, the cost is estimated to be between £10K and £12K.
- Whitley Street Local Centre - Remove one traffic lane outbound and reallocate to cyclists, alongside other public realm enhancements for pedestrians. This would be implemented as a temporary measure under legislation, however the scheme itself could be made permanent with minimal additional works as it would involve highway remarking rather than temporary barriers due to need to maintain access to the existing parking bays. Public realm improvements such as decluttering the footway could be implemented in the medium term. The costs for road markings is estimated to be between £5k and £6k.
- Southampton Street / Silver Street - Introduce cycle lanes through removal of existing road hatching. Plans have been developed through the University & Hospital area study and could therefore be implemented quickly as a permanent measure through remarking the highway. The costs for road markings is estimated to be between £8k and £10k.
- Redlands Road - Introduce southbound cycle lane (uphill) and cycle priority measures at Christchurch Green junction. This would be implemented as a permanent measure through remarking the highway. The costs for road markings is estimated to be between £10 and £12k.

5.5 The above proposals would represent the first tranche of schemes with further initiatives being planned around a set criteria as set out below. Further schemes will come forward for approval in due course.

5.6 In principle future schemes will:

- provide temporary walking and cycling infrastructure that helps to protect public health by supporting social distancing
- support essential journeys such as to and from hospitals and health services, to shops, pharmacies and schools
- support journeys that support exercise, for example routes to neighbourhoods and local parks
- provide safe options to travel
- support economic recovery
- support and not prejudice the long term viability of the public transport network
- support wider health initiatives

5.7 The below is not an exhaustive list of future schemes that could be implemented subject to the Government funding to include the Government's Active Travel Fund:

Medium term:

- Blagrove Street - Introduce contraflow cycle lane between Town Hall Square and Reading Station. This scheme would require construction works to implement the cycleway between the footway and parking bays and would therefore be a permanent scheme to be implemented in the medium term.
- Basingstoke Road - Review of existing bus/cycle lanes and road hatching, upgrade bus priority at signals etc to introduce a more joined-up 'smart and sustainable corridor' Some short-term 'quick win' temporary measures could be identified but the full corridor approach would involve construction works which would therefore be a permanent scheme to be implemented in the medium term.
- Develop proposals for London Road and implementing a west bound cycle route, potentially as a bus lane subject to discussions with Reading Buses regarding the frequency of services that could use this route. This would be implemented on a temporary basis, however the scheme itself could be made permanent with minimal additional works as it would involve highway road markings and vertical signs rather than temporary barriers.
- Traffic Management Sub-Committee has discussed wider use of 20mph speed limits and a number of proposals have been developed. 20mph speed limits have been campaigned for in various parts of the Borough including Central (lower) Caversham and central Tilehurst. Our local centres have been used more during the Covid-19 outbreak with an increase in walking and cycling. The Traffic Management Sub-Committee requests for Traffic Management Measures issues list contains a number of requests for pedestrian crossings, improved cycling facilities alongside more 20mph speed limits. Progression of any new 20mph speed limits will need to be carefully considered against the current quiet network conditions which is making driving at excess speed attractive for some car drivers, and how such speed limits can be effectively enforced either by physical measures or by the Police (who remain responsible for enforcing speed limits) or by a combination of both.

Longer term:

- A number of schemes are currently being considered which would complement the above projects. There is a risk that the short and medium term proposals will be seen as piecemeal proposals and it's important to see the proposals as part of a longer term plan which would review the option of further road space reallocations in the Borough, possibly including but not limited to:
 - Scheme from the Centre to East Reading through a joined-up approach to the provision of sustainable transport facilities on Kings Road and London Road.

- Enhancements in West Reading including on Bath Road and further opportunities along the Oxford Road to deliver the new sections of bus lane as a part of the agreed corridor study and enhance and complement that scheme.
- Opportunities in North Reading, including improved access to Christchurch Bridge alongside walking and cycling enhancements in Caversham local centre and on Caversham Bridge.
- Progression of measures in South Reading including on Basingstoke Road as referenced above, Shinfield Road and the A33 public transport scheme.
- Enhancements to walking and cycling routes to/from and through the town centre alongside improving the quality of the urban realm.

6.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1 At the time of writing this report, details of the Government's £250m active travel fund had yet to be confirmed. It is the Council's intention to use capital funding within its agreed Capital Programme to get the schemes quickly implemented, and then claim back the money through the Government's Active Travel Fund, once the bidding process is open and the Government provides clarity on that process.

6.2 Scheme funding for the projects listed in recommendation 2.1 will be taken from the following lines in the Capital Programme:

- Local Traffic Management and Road Safety Schemes (£359k) - Sidmouth Street, Gosbrook Road and Reading Bridge proposals complement and support this programme (Total allocation £46k)
- Oxford Road Corridor Works (£318k) - delivery of the on-road cycle lanes form a part of the existing capital scheme (Total allocation £12k)
- LTP Development (£200k) - Whitley Street Local Centre, Southampton Street / Silver Street, and Redlands Road proposals support this programme (Total allocation £28k)

The use of these existing Capital Programme allocations, which support ongoing road safety improvements, is consistent with the outcomes arising from these schemes. In some cases, projects will now be delivered earlier than previously planned within the Programme such as the LTP Development projects.

6.3 Other than the proposals set out in recommendation 2.1, funding from the Government would be required for implementation of the schemes set out in this report. Consideration in the future could be given to the use of CIL local funds. Use of these funds will require public consultation.

7.0 CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS

7.1 The Council has adopted a Strategic Framework (March 2020) which sets out the Council's key priorities including:

- To keep social care services running for the children and adults who need them;
- To support vulnerable and isolated people during the crisis;
- To support business and the economy, which will secure the long term recovery of Reading.

7.2 These proposed measures will enable residents and people who work and study in Reading to more easily consider a return to work or a return to normal activities as the lockdown measures are gradually lifted. Transport is integral to the functioning of business and the economy and it is suggested that these measures to promote more walking and cycling opportunities will have a positive impact for business and the economy as well as helping people to feel safe.

8.0 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INFORMATION

- 8.1 Advertising of the Temporary Traffic Regulation Orders will be conducted in accordance with appropriate legislation. Notices will be advertised in the local printed newspaper and erected on lamp columns within the affected area. If this is not possible, alternative means will be proposed such as delivering the notice to each property within the affected area, and promoting the notice in the online version of local media.

9.0 EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 9.1 Under the Equality Act 2010, Section 149 the Council must, in the exercise of its functions, 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 The Council has reviewed the scope of the proposals as outlined within this report and considers that the proposals have no direct impact on any groups with protected characteristics. However, the service will meet with representatives of the Access and Disability forums to determine whether they have any concerns or issues regarding the proposals.

10. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 Some interventions will not require Traffic Regulation Orders (TROs). Others will require TROs, of which there are different types. The main ones are:
- Permanent: this process includes prior consultation on the proposed scheme design, a 21-day notice period for statutory consultees and others who can log objections; there could be a public inquiry in some circumstances.
 - Temporary: these can be in place for up to 18 months. There is a 7-day notice period prior to making the TRO and a 14-day notification requirement after it is made, plus publicity requirements. These are most suitable for putting in place temporary measures and road closures. Temporary Traffic Regulation Orders will require advertisement, in accordance with the Local Authorities Traffic Orders (Procedure) (England and Wales) Regulations 1996. A Temporary Traffic Regulation Order will be made in accordance with section 14(1) of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984, as amended.
- 10.2 Necessary changes to Highway signing and lining, including temporary, will need to be implemented in accordance with the Traffic Signs, Regulations and General Directions 2016 and associated Code of Practice for temporary Highway signing.

11. ENVIRONMENTAL AND CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 Transport is the biggest greenhouse gas emitting sector in the UK accounting for around 27% of total carbon emissions. As set out in the draft Climate Emergency Strategy this figure is lower in Reading with transport accounting for around 20% of carbon emissions, however significant investment in sustainable transport solutions is vital in order to respond to the Climate Emergency declared by the Council in February 2019 and to help achieve our target of a carbon neutral Reading by 2030.

11.2 Proposals set out in this paper seek to support a step-change in transport infrastructure and services and a shift towards sustainable and clean modes of transport as attractive alternatives to private vehicles. This builds on the considerable success of increasing the number of walking, cycling and public transport trips into Reading town centre to 80% as part of the delivery of previous Local Transport Plans.

12. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- None