

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT BY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF ECONOMIC GROWTH AND NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

TO:	STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT, PLANNING AND TRANSPORT COMMITTEE		
DATE:	15 MARCH 2021		
TITLE:	MAJOR TRANSPORT SCHEMES & FUNDING BIDS UPDATE		
LEAD COUNCILLOR:	COUNCILLOR PAGE	PORTFOLIO:	STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT, PLANNING AND TRANSPORT
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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report provides an update on progress with delivery of the current programme of major transport projects in Reading, including:
- Reading Station Interchanges
 - 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 the development of future schemes and associated funding opportunities.

2. RECOMMENDED ACTION

- 2.1 That the Committee notes progress with delivery of the current programme of major transport schemes.
- 2.2 That the Committee notes progress with developing future schemes and potential funding opportunities.

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 enabling the economic recovery and planned levels of growth in the borough and wider urban area. The Council's approved Capital Programme provides capital funding of over £50m for the projects listed in this report. Funding is provided from grants received from the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) and Central Government, developer contributions (Section 106 and CIL contributions), investment from Network Rail and Great Western Railway (GWR), and Council borrowing.
- 3.2 Our current Local Transport Plan (LTP) for the period 2011-26 sets the policy for promoting safe and sustainable travel within, to and from the Borough. The majority of schemes within the current strategy have either been delivered or are in the process of being delivered, therefore a new draft transport strategy has been prepared 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, resulting in strong support for the proposed objectives which included enabling healthier lifestyles and creating a cleaner and greener Reading. Subsequently, the new draft strategy has been prepared to help achieve these transport objectives alongside wider policies including the Reading 2050 Vision, Local Plan and Climate Emergency Strategy, which commits to achieving significant modal shift to sustainable transport modes as part of the objective for Reading to become carbon neutral by 2030. Statutory consultation for the transport strategy was undertaken last year and the strategy is currently being updated to reflect the feedback received. The updated LTP planned to be presented for approval later in the year. A major focus of the strategy is providing realistic sustainable alternatives to the private car, which is a key objective of all the current and future major transport schemes as set out within this report.
- 3.4 The on-going Covid-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on travel demand in Reading, particularly during the national lockdown last year when traffic levels dramatically reduced and levels of walking and cycling increased. Prior to the latest lockdown, travel demand had begun to increase with usage on local bus services at around 50% of pre-pandemic levels, local rail services at 40-50% and traffic on the Highways England network at around 90% of expected levels. However, it is clear the public health messaging regarding the importance of active travel and the greater flexibility for office workers to work from home creates an opportunity to reallocate road space for the use of sustainable modes of travel. This forms the basis for our ambitious plans for sustainable transport included within this report and the accompanying Active Travel and School Streets Update report to this Committee.

4. THE PROPOSAL

Major Transport Schemes - Current Programme

Reading Station Interchanges

- 4.1 Following completion of the Network Rail led £850m redevelopment of Reading Station, further improvements are being made to the multi-modal interchanges at the south and north of the station. The Council has secured £36,000 funding from GWR's Customer and Communities Improvement Fund for the delivery of further wayfinding and cycle parking security improvements in this area.
- 4.2 The scheme 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 Installation of the three wayfinding units outside Reading Station was successfully completed by our in-house Highways team in November last year. The CCTV cameras are due to be installed this spring, which will be connected to the central CCTV facility overseen by the Council and Thames Valley Police.

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 which are being delivered in phases as funding is secured. In the future, the scheme has the potential to become a guided-bus, tram or autonomous shared vehicle system.
- 4.5 Funding of over £15m has been secured for the scheme from the Local Growth Fund (LGF) and fettered S106 developer contributions, with phases 1-3 of the scheme successfully delivered. Phase 4 is currently being constructed on-site, which includes an outbound bus lane on the A33 between Rose Kiln Lane and Lindisfarne Way (Kennet Island), and the upgrade of the traffic signals to a MOVA method of control at the A33 / Bennet Road gyratory. Construction has been delayed due to the Covid-19 pandemic, however works are progressing well on-site with a planned completion date of early summer 2021.

Thames Valley Park, Park & Ride

- 4.6 Thames Valley Park, Park & Ride is a new facility off the A3290 to the east of Reading, in close proximity to Thames Valley Park business park. The facility forms a vital part of our strategy for a comprehensive network of park & ride sites surrounding the urban area, with dedicated priority for fast-track public transport services linking the P&R sites and Reading town centre.
- 4.7 Delivery of the scheme is being led by Wokingham Borough Council and construction work commenced on-site in February 2018. The latest programme from Wokingham is that construction works are complete and the facility will become operational as travel demand picks up following the current downturn as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. The site is currently being used as a mobile testing facility by the NHS, alongside Mere oak P&R site which is located south of the M4 Junction 11.

Reading Green Park Station

- 4.8 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.
- 4.9 The scheme is being progressed in partnership with Network Rail and Great Western Railway (GWR), who will ultimately own and operate the station respectively. Funding for the scheme has been secured from the Local Growth Fund (£9.15m), Section 106 developer contributions (£5.6m) and the New Station's Fund 2 (£2.3m), with planning permission granted in 2015.
- 4.10 Construction of the station and multi-modal interchange has continued on-site for the duration of the Covid-19 pandemic, however this has resulted in further delays to the programme and the current timeline indicates construction works will be complete by late summer 2021 at the earliest. Once complete, the station will go through a period of testing before its official opening and public use. The Council is working with Network Rail and GWR to ensure that the station is open as soon as possible after construction works are complete.

Reading West Station Upgrade

- 4.11 A Masterplan for significant enhancements to the station and wider interchange has been prepared by the Council, in partnership with GWR and Network Rail. Funding of £3.1m has been secured from the Local Growth Fund (LGF) and £200,000 Section 106 developer contributions for the current phases of works which will deliver enhanced passenger facilities and security improvements in line with the overall Masterplan vision for the station.

- 4.12 The proposals for the current phase of works include a new station building on the Oxford Road with associated highway alterations and interchange improvements, increased cycle parking, improvements within the station itself such as enhanced lighting, and a new ticket gateline at the Tilehurst Road station entrance. The scheme will provide enhanced safety and security at both entrances and within the station through enhanced CCTV coverage and lighting, which have been designed with input from the British Transport Police. Detailed designs for the interchange and highway enhancements of the current phase of works are complete, and the Council is working with GWR and Network Rail to progress the station elements of the scheme. Further details, including artists impressions and FAQs, are available here - <https://www.reading.gov.uk/council/policies-finance-and-legal-information/transport-schemes-and-projects/reading-west-station/>
- 4.13 Planning consent for the scheme was granted at the Council's Planning Applications Committee in January 2021. Detailed design for the station elements of the scheme are being progressed in partnership with GWR, and construction of the enhanced interchange and highway arrangements commenced on-site in February. The current scheme will include passive provision for accessibility enhancements within the designs, 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 work with railway partners including Network Rail to seek opportunities to secure funding for these elements of the overall Masterplan vision for the station.

NCN (National Cycle Network) Route 422

- 4.14 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, as well as the continuation of the NCN route to the west into West Berkshire and the east into Wokingham and beyond.
- 4.15 The final element of the scheme was implemented last year which included widening the footway and associated improvements on Bath Road between the junctions with New Lane Hill and Greenwood Road, to create a shared facility for cyclists and pedestrians. These works were delayed by the presence of a poorly maintained, privately-owned retaining wall at the edge of the footway. The next steps for the scheme are to finalise recommendations from the Road Safety Audit and to establish monitoring arrangements in line with the requirements of the grant funding. The full NCN route will be officially opened when works in neighbouring authorities have also been completed.

Major Transport Schemes - Future Funding Opportunities

Third Thames Crossing East of Reading

- 4.16 A third vehicular and sustainable transport 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 Caversham, 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.
- 4.17 The scheme has been submitted to the DfT by Transport for the South East (TfSE) for possible funding through the Large Local Major Schemes programme. TfSE ranked the scheme as the second highest priority scheme of this magnitude in the South East region. We are currently working with officers from each authority through the Cross Thames Travel Group to assess possible options and progress development of this scheme, including liaison with colleagues at the DfT and TfSE. Reading will continue to advocate the full set of proposals to improve cross-river travel as included within our current Local Transport Plan.

Thames Valley Berkshire LEP - Future Schemes

- 4.18 Thames Valley Berkshire LEP, through the Berkshire Local Transport Body (BLTB), maintains a prioritised pipeline of future schemes across Berkshire to be in the best possible position to secure funding from future opportunities from Government. The Council has submitted a proposal to continue works for the overall South Reading MRT scheme, through phases 5 & 6, which the LEP has ranked as the joint second highest priority out of the 16 schemes submitted across Berkshire. The total cost of the phases 5 & 6 scheme is £12m, with the bid seeking £10m from the LEP and £2m local contribution from the Council, as included in our existing approved Capital Programme. The proposal also sets out options to deliver the full MRT scheme if funding is available, or to deliver sub-sections depending on the level of funding available to the LEP.
- 4.19 The South Reading MRT scheme is a key element of the draft Reading Transport Strategy 2036. It will support delivery of the overall objectives of the strategy, including those relating to air quality, climate change and economic growth. The LEP has confirmed there will be further opportunities to submit additional bids next year to be included in the LEP's future pipeline of schemes, once our draft transport strategy has been finalised. Any further schemes would need to be worked up and may require local contributions from the Council. A detailed business case would be prepared, and individual schemes considered on their own merits, alongside other Council proposals which require finite capital funding.
- 4.20 In addition, the Council has supported proposals submitted to the BLTB by Great Western Railway (GWR) for Tilehurst Station Upgrade, a Berkshire wide 'Smart City Cluster' technology project and proposals from Wokingham

Borough Council for sustainable transport infrastructure to support delivery of the proposed Grazeley Garden Settlement and Four Valleys developments, which include a new sustainable transport bridge over the M4 linking Grazeley with Green Park.

5. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS

5.1 The delivery of the projects outlined in this report will help to deliver the following service priorities in the Council's Corporate Plan:

- 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. ENVIRONMENTAL AND CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS

6.1 Transport is the biggest greenhouse gas emitting sector in the UK accounting for around 27% of total carbon emissions. As set out in the Reading 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. Reading Climate Change Partnership's Reading Climate Emergency Strategy 2020-25 and the new RBC corporate Carbon Plan 2020-25 were both adopted in November 2020.

6.2 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 major transport 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.

7. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INFORMATION

7.1 The projects have and will be communicated to the local community through public exhibitions and Council meetings.

7.2 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.

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. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 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.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 All relevant schemes under delivery are monitored regularly as part of the Council's wider Capital Programme. This sets out the funding sources and funding profile for each scheme.
- 10.2 With regards to future schemes, timescales for a decision on funding from Central Government and the LEP are not currently known, however a minimum 20% local contribution from the Council is generally required towards the total cost of each scheme. The South Reading MRT Phases 5&6 scheme is included in the Council's approved Capital Programme with the same levels of funding as set out in the proposal to the BLTB. The Third Thames Crossing bid submitted to the DfT by Wokingham BC did not include any commitment to local match funding for the current phase of works.

11. BACKGROUND PAPERS

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