

## READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

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

<b>TO:</b>	STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT, PLANNING AND TRANSPORT COMMITTEE		
<b>DATE:</b>	30 JUNE 2021		
<b>TITLE:</b>	LOCAL TRANSPORT PLAN - NEXT STEPS		
<b>LEAD COUNCILLOR:</b>	COUNCILLOR PAGE	<b>PORTFOLIO:</b>	STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT, PLANNING & TRANSPORT
<b>SERVICE:</b>	PLANNING, TRANSPORT AND REGULATORY SERVICES	<b>WARDS:</b>	ALL
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#### 1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to update the Committee on the proposed next steps for progression of the Council's next Local Transport Plan (LTP), the Reading Transport Strategy 2036, following the statutory consultation which was undertaken last year.
- 1.2 The recommendations in this report are made in the context of the continuing uncertainty regarding travel patterns in the 'new normal', the need to focus limited resources on the economic recovery from the current pandemic and the significant opportunities recently announced by Government to secure investment to deliver sustainable transport alternatives to the private car.
- 1.3 **Annex A: Strategic Transport Service Area Priorities (June - November 2021)**

#### 2 RECOMMENDED ACTION

- 2.1 That the Committee notes the contents of this report and agrees to the recommendation to focus on existing priorities as set out in Annex A in 2021/22, including the development of detailed Local Transport Plan sub-strategies to put the Council in the best position to secure external funding for sustainable transport schemes and initiatives.
- 2.2 To pause further work on the draft Local Transport Plan pending the establishment of new baseline information in 2022/23 with a view to building an evidence base to bid for any new funding streams which will deliver sustainable, inclusive traffic demand management solutions across the town.

### **3. POLICY CONTEXT**

- 3.1 It is a statutory duty for all Local Transport Authorities to produce and keep under review a Local Transport Plan (LTP) under the Transport Act 2000, as amended by the Local Transport Act 2008. Reading's existing LTP for the period 2011-26 was adopted by Council in March 2011, setting out our overarching strategy for transport provision in Reading to 2026.
- 3.2 A new draft LTP (the Reading Transport Strategy 2036) has been developed based on feedback received from the initial visioning consultation which was undertaken between July to September 2019, and the statutory consultation which was undertaken between May to August 2020. The initial consultation demonstrated strong support for the key principles, vision and objectives to underpin development of the strategy, whilst the statutory consultation provided valuable feedback on the detailed policies, schemes and initiatives set out within the strategy. One key element of feedback received from the statutory consultation was the differing views on expectations for changes to travel behaviours in the 'new normal', demonstrating considerable uncertainty in this area at the current time.
- 3.3 Whilst the LTP sets the context and overarching vision for future transport provision in Reading, sub-strategies provide more detailed implementation plans for specific topics. These form the basis for preparing funding proposals to deliver key elements of each sub-strategy, including the recently produced Local Cycling & Walking Infrastructure Plan. Further sub-strategies which are currently being developed including a Public Rights of Way Improvement Plan, Electric vehicles Strategy and the recently announced Bus Service Improvement Plan.

### **4. BACKGROUND**

- 4.1 The draft version of the Reading Transport Strategy 2036 sets out a 15-year vision to transform transport provision in Reading in line with the key principles of the 'healthy streets' and 'liveable neighbourhoods' concepts. The core objectives of the strategy, which were heavily supported by both the initial visioning and subsequent statutory consultations, are:
- Creating a Clean and Green Reading
  - Supporting Healthy Lifestyles
  - Enabling Sustainable and Inclusive Growth
  - Connecting People and Places
  - Embracing Smart Solutions
- 4.2 As part of the development the draft Reading Transport Strategy 2036, initial work to investigate the feasibility of demand management measures (such as a Clean Air Zone, Road User Charging or a Workplace Parking Levy) was undertaken to compliment the provision of enhanced sustainable travel options as set out within the strategy. This work included undertaking parking surveys of businesses within Reading to consider options regarding a Workplace Parking Levy, and initial business case work to investigate the environmental and economic case for developing a Clean Air Zone.

- 4.3 The initial findings from this work demonstrated limited financial and environmental benefits resulting from implementation of a demand management scheme at this time. The environmental case for a CAZ identified that the expected improvements in air quality would be marginal and that only one (of 13) receptors that currently exceeds the Air Quality Standard would improve sufficiently so that it no longer exceeded the acceptable standard, with 12 still exceeding the AQS. The report also noted that due to the current CAZ minimum standard, between 95% and 100% of vehicles would be compliant by 2026/27.
- 4.4 Subsequently, further high-level analysis has been undertaken to consider possible demand management options to help address the issue of 'rat-running' and through traffic which adds to congestion in Reading, with particular reference to Caversham Road / IDR and the two crossings over the River Thames. The recommendations of this report noted that insufficient data was currently available and therefore it should be revisited once traffic flows and behaviours have re-baselined in the 'new normal'.
- 4.5 The on-going pandemic has had a significant impact on travel demand in Reading, resulting in current uncertainty regarding longer-term behavioural changes which may result from the pandemic. In particular, public health messaging regarding the importance of active travel and the greater flexibility for office workers to work from home has created a unique opportunity to improve air quality and promote cycling and walking through the provision of high-quality routes and facilities. Sustainable transport schemes therefore have a vital role to play in enabling a 'green recovery' through a model of inclusive, green growth to help create the jobs of the future in environmental technology and other green industries.

## 5. CURRENT PROGRESS

- 5.1 The Council is at a critical stage in the delivery of a number of significant sustainable transport schemes which will deliver substantial air quality and Climate Change benefits to Reading. This includes major public transport investments (Green Park Station, Reading West Station Upgrade and South Reading MRT) and active travel schemes (National Cycle Network Route 422, Active Travel Fund Tranche 2, Capability Fund - subject to Government funding award, and School Streets). The main focus of all of these schemes is to provide high-quality, attractive alternatives to the private car, enabling residents to make sustainable travel choices with the resultant public health, air quality and carbon reduction benefits.
- 5.2 These schemes are included in the overall priorities for the Strategic Transport service area in 2021/22, as set out at **Annex A**. These priorities include development of detailed LTP sub-strategies and take account of work resulting from recent Government announcements such as the National Bus Strategy. It should be noted that these priorities are in addition to the on-going business as usual workload of the service area, and currently unknown work (such as future funding opportunities) which may arise during this period. The service is currently at capacity and any new workstreams will either result in pausing another project or having funding to pay for external support.

- 5.3 In addition to recent external funding awarded to the Council for walking and cycling schemes and initiatives, it is envisaged that future opportunities will be predicated on the Council demonstrating strong ambition through an updated Local Cycling Walking Improvement Plan (LCWIP) (in line with the latest Government cycling guidelines) and the recently announced Bus Service Improvement Plan and Enhanced Partnership arrangements with local operators. These are therefore vital pieces of work to ensure we are best placed to take advantage of future opportunities.
- 5.4 In light of the information set out above, the following options have been considered regarding the next steps for the LTP:
- Option A - Update the draft LTP in 2021/22 for adoption to reflect what we currently know in relation to the ‘new normal’ priorities and emerging travel patterns. Whilst this option would result in the new LTP being finalised, there are a number of risks in relation to the adoption of a plan at a time of great uncertainty around for example hybrid workplaces, town centre stability and the use of public transport. This option would also result in limited Council resources being diverted from delivering current sustainable transport schemes which will help to assist with the post pandemic economic recovery to create a more inclusive society, and less resource availability to focus on upcoming opportunities to secure additional external investment in Reading for future sustainable schemes and initiatives.
  - Option B - Focus on the priorities as set out in **Annex A** in 2021/22, including the development of detailed LTP sub-strategies to put the Council in the best position to secure external funding for sustainable transport schemes and initiatives. In addition, explore opportunities to secure external funding for future schemes and the further development of demand management measures, alongside monitoring of the ‘new normal’ to inform an update of the draft LTP to commence later in the year. This will require at least a year to understand how workplace and shopping patterns have changed and in the interim, the focus on funded schemes, delivering modal shift and significant public transport infrastructure improvements. Additionally, the opportunity to focus limited resources on a new Bus Service Improvement Plan will put the Council in the best position to secure funding to deliver the plan for this vital mode of sustainable, inclusive transport provision in Reading.

#### Recommendation

- 5.5 It is recommended that the Committee agrees that Option B is progressed to enable the current focus of limited resources on the priorities as set out at **Annex A**. This would also allow for new demand management options to be explored alongside development of the LTP, including a review of emerging lower cost technology which might enable different schemes to be delivered. This work would be programmed in for 2022/23 and would align with a re-established, more stable baseline for traffic flow, congestion and air quality impact.
- 5.6 This approach would support the post-Covid economic recovery, including the high streets in the town centre and local centres throughout the borough. It

would also align with a key corporate priority to build a more inclusive economy in Reading through the provision of affordable transport options to enable access to education, training, employment and leisure opportunities for everyone. This would also be a key focus of any future demand management work to ensure social inequalities are not inadvertently impacted by a potential charging scheme without high-quality, affordable alternatives in place.

- 5.7 This approach would also align with the recent findings of the National Infrastructure Commission which found ‘making policy decisions during continued uncertainty may mean taking a more adaptive approach to longer term project commitments and investing in new data sources which can help understand how these changes are unfolding. All these approaches are preferable to planning on the basis of fixed assumptions about what will happen based on short term observations. The Commission’s analysis suggests that the spread of potential outcomes for transport, particularly public transport, is wider compared to digital, energy, waste and water’.

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

- 6.1 The development and delivery of sustainable transport strategies and schemes as outlined in this report help to deliver the following service priorities in the Council’s Corporate Plan 2021/22:

- Healthy Environment
- Thriving Communities
- Inclusive Economy

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

- 7.1 Transport is the biggest greenhouse gas emitting sector in the UK accounting for around 27% of total carbon emissions. As set out in our 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.
- 7.2 The proposals set out in this paper respond to this challenge by promoting a step-change in transport infrastructure and services and a shift towards walking and cycling as attractive alternatives to private vehicles. This builds on the considerable success we have achieved in recent years of increasing the number of walking, cycling and public transport trips into Reading town centre to 80% and bus usage in Reading being the second highest in the country outside of London, having increased by 23% since 2010, (both pre-pandemic figures).
- 7.3 The draft transport strategy has been developed in parallel with the Climate Change strategy, particularly the transport theme, to ensure consistency between the two strategies and to ensure the delivery of each strategy supports the overarching objectives of both strategies.

## **8. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INFORMATION**

- 8.1 Statutory consultation was undertaken as part of the development of the Council's current LTP 2011-26.
- 8.2 In addition, a fundamental element to development of the draft Reading Transport Strategy 2036 has been engagement and consultation with a wide range of stakeholders, local interest groups and residents, with the final strategy being based upon the main themes of feedback received. The overarching vision and key principles underpinning the strategy were overwhelmingly supported in the initial consultation, and the statutory consultation built upon these strong foundations with valuable feedback and suggestions for the final document.

## **9. 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 An equalities Impact Assessment was undertaken to support development of the current LTP 2011-26. In addition, an Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA), which incorporates an Equality Impact Assessment, has been undertaken as an integral part of the development of the Reading Transport Strategy 2036. In addition to equality, the IIA also considers the health and environmental implications of the proposed policies, schemes and initiatives contained within the strategy.
- 9.3 Sub-strategies and future schemes and initiatives as outlined in the draft strategy will be subject to further Equality Impact Assessments as they are developed.

## **10. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 10.1 The Local Transport Plan is a statutory requirement as set out in the Transport Act 2000, as amended by the Local Transport Act 2008. The Strategic Environmental Assessment, Equality Impact Assessment and Health Impact Assessment, considered in the overarching Integrated Impact Assessment, is also a statutory requirement.
- 10.2 The Council is fulfilling its statutory duty with an existing adopted LTP to 2026 and currently updating LTP sub-strategies including the Local Cycling & Walking Infrastructure Plan, Public Rights of Way Improvement Plan, Electric Vehicles Strategy and the recently announced Bus Service Improvement Plan.

## **11. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 11.1 There are no direct financial implications resulting from this report. The development of the draft transport strategy has been funded by existing transport revenue budgets to date.

11.2 The development and delivery of schemes set out in the draft strategy will be subject to future funding being identified and/or secured, such as grants issued by Central Government, Thames Valley Berkshire LEP and private sector contributions secured through the planning process.

## **12. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

12.1 Local Transport Plan 3: Strategy 2011-2026, Council, 29 March 2011

12.2 New Local Transport Plan & Borough-Wide Car Parking and Air Quality Strategy, Policy Committee, 16 July 2018

12.3 Local Cycling & Walking Infrastructure Plan - Draft for Consultation, Strategic Environment, Planning & Transport Committee, 20 November 2019

12.4 Rights of Way Improvement Plan - Update Report, Traffic Management Sub-Committee, 9 January 2020

12.5 Reading Transport Strategy 2036 - Draft for Statutory Consultation, Strategic Environment, Planning & Transport Committee, 16 March 2020

## ANNEX A - STRATEGIC TRANSPORT SERVICE AREA PRIORITIES (JUNE - OCTOBER 2021)

### Draft Reading Transport Strategy 2036 - Objectives

	<b>Creating a Clean and Green Reading</b>	Provide transport options to enhance quality of life, reduce emissions and improve air quality to create a carbon neutral town
	<b>Supporting Healthy Lifestyles</b>	Create healthy streets to encourage active travel and lifestyles, improve accessibility to key destinations and increase personal safety
	<b>Enabling Sustainable and Inclusive Growth</b>	Enable sustainable growth and connect communities so that everyone can benefit from Reading's success
	<b>Connecting People and Places</b>	Promote the use of sustainable modes of transport by providing attractive alternatives to the private car, helping to provide a transport network that is fast, affordable, connected and resilient
	<b>Embracing Smart Solutions</b>	Use technology to manage the network efficiently and allow informed travel choices, whilst enabling Reading to become a smart, connected town of the future

2021/22 Milestones Quarter	Priority Project	Next Key Milestone	Resources - Internal / External	LTP 4 Objectives
Q1	Active Travel - Tranche 2	Analyse consultation responses and Committee approval to proceed with detailed design - June 2021	Both	  
Q1	Active Travel Capability Fund - Subject to Gov funding decision	Committee approval and programme delivery (including the town centre cycle hub) - June 2021	Both	  
Q1	School Streets	Finalise arrangements for Wilson and Thameside schemes, Committee decision on Crescent Road - June 2021	Both	  
Q1	Enhanced Partnerships with Bus Operators	Publish confirmation of the Council's intention to establish Enhanced Partnership arrangements - June 2021	Both	  
Q1	Zero Emission Bus Fund - Subject to	Preparation of initial Expression of Interest (in	Both	 

	internal approval to proceed	partnership with RTL) - June 2021		
Q2	NCN Route 422	Finalise land purchase and complete construction works - August 2021	Internal	   
Q2	South Reading MRT - Phases 3 & 4	Ongoing management of contractor and scheme completion - August 2021	Both	   
Q2	Reading West Station Upgrade	Start construction works, finalise land transfer and funding agreements with NR/GWR - Summer 2021	Both	   
Q2	Rights of Way Improvement Plan	Undertake initial consultation to inform plan update - Summer 2021	Internal	   
Q2	Electric Vehicle Strategy	Develop draft strategy for internal review - Summer 2021	Both	    
Q2	Transport Consultancy Term Contract	Preparation of specification for procurement - Summer 2021	Internal	
Q2	Travel Demand Management - Covid Grant	Programme delivery and grant funding claims - September 2021	Both	   
Q2	Concessionary Travel Scheme (in-year saving)	Six monthly review with operators - September 2021	Internal	   
Q3	Bus Service Improvement Plan	Prepare draft plan for publication - October 2021	Both	    
Q3	Local Walking & Cycling Implementation Plan	Update based on consultation responses and Gear Change strategy requirements - Autumn 2021	Both	   

Q3	Sustainable Modes of Travel to School Plan	Review and update plan in light of recent developments - Autumn 2021	Internal	   
Q3	Welcome Back / High Streets Fund	Coordination of grant funding claims and review of social distancing measures - Autumn 2021	Internal	 
Q3	Enhanced Partnerships with Bus Operators	Commence negotiation with operators to develop partnership arrangements -Autumn 2021	Both	  
Q3	Community Transport Contract (Dial-a-Ride and Adult Social Care)	Develop strategy for new procurement of service (to be agreed with ASC) - Autumn 2021	Internal	 
Q3	Local Transport Plan	Commence update to draft LTP document - April 2022	Both	    
Q3	Green Park Station	Ongoing management of contractor and scheme completion and handover to NR/GWR - Winter 2021	Both	  
Q3	Electric Vehicle Charging Points	Development of initial programme of new charge points - Winter 2021	Internal	   