

## 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>	MAJOR TRANSPORT SCHEMES UPDATE		
<b>LEAD COUNCILLOR:</b>	<b>COUNCILLOR 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 the progress with delivery of the current programme of Major Transport Schemes in Reading, as listed below:

- 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 transport schemes and funding opportunities.

1.3 **Appendix A - Reading West Station Upgrade - Station Building Footprint**

#### 2. RECOMMENDED ACTION

2.1 That the Committee notes the progress made on the delivery of the current programme of major transport schemes as outlined in this report.

2.2 That delegated authority is given to the Executive Director of Economic Growth & Neighbourhood Services, in consultation with the Lead Councillor for Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport, the Assistant Director of

Legal & Democratic Services and the Director of Finance, to enter into a Funding Agreement with Great Western Railway (GWR) for the delivery of the Reading West Railway Station Upgrade scheme.

- 2.3 That delegated authority is given to the Executive Director of Economic Growth & Neighbourhood Services, in consultation with the Lead Councillor for Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport, the Assistant Director of Legal & Democratic Services and the Director of Finance, in liaison with Network Rail to transfer to Network Rail any Council land identified as required to facilitate the construction of the new Reading West Railway Station passenger building.
- 2.4 That Committee note the separate application being undertaken by the Head of Transportation and Streetcare pursuant to authority delegated to him under the Council's Scheme of Officer Delegations for the "stopping up of the public highway" at Reading West Railway Station under Section 247 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990.
- 2.5 That Committee notes the progress made with developing future transport schemes and potential funding opportunities for the Council.

### 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 Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) contributions), investment from Network Rail and GWR, and Council borrowing.
- 3.2 The Council's current Local Transport Plan (LTP) sets out its transport strategy for Reading up to 2026. Consultation on a new LTP was undertaken from 4<sup>th</sup> May to 30<sup>th</sup> August 2020. The new strategy is being developed to help achieve wider objectives including the Reading 2050 Vision, the Climate Emergency and improved air quality, and to be aligned with other Council strategies including the new Local Plan and Health & Wellbeing Strategy. However, given the impact of the current pandemic and potential for significant changes in travel patterns which will require at least a year to understand, further monitoring is currently being undertaken to understand these changes to ensure the new LTP is updated with the latest information before being finalised, as set out in a separate report to this Committee.
- 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. 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 also 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 for the cycle hub were subsequently installed in May this year, which are 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 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 August 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 the Council's 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. The latest programme from Wokingham is that construction works are now 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 GWR, who will ultimately own and operate the station respectively. Funding for the scheme has been secured from the Local Growth Fund (£9.7m), Section 106 developer contributions (£5.6m) and the New Station's Fund 2 (£4.8m), 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 2021. 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 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.

- 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. In order to facilitate the station building on the southern side of the Oxford Road on what will be a widened footway this area of land (outlined in Appendix A) is required to be 'stopped-up' from highway land to form part of the railway as per the conditions of the planning approval. The Council is continuing to work with Network Rail to identify existing land boundaries, and to transfer any necessary land within the "stopped up" area to Network Rail to form part of the station lease area of GWR.
- 4.14 Following completion of the highways and interchange works, GWR will take possession of the southern footway and commence their station build construction programme. Due to the LEP funding being awarded directly to the Council, a Funding Agreement will need to be entered into between the Council and GWR for the station elements of the overall scheme. The final completion of the overall project is currently projected to be summer 2022.
- 4.15 The current scheme being delivered by GWR will include passive provision for accessibility enhancements within the designs, however Network Rail's requirement for a full rebuild of the platforms to enable full accessibility enhancements such as the implementation of lifts means delivery of these elements is not currently affordable within the funding envelope for the current scheme. A full platform rebuild is also required to deliver the necessary minimum widths to enable safe usage of the station for wheelchair users, passengers with buggies etc. 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

- 4.16 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.
- 4.17 The final significant element of the scheme 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, however these works are scheduled to be completed within the next month. The full NCN route will be officially opened when works in neighbouring authorities have also been completed and monitoring arrangements will be established with all authorities in line with the requirements of the grant funding.

## Major Transport Schemes - Future Funding Opportunities

### 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 our wider vision to provide sustainable travel options in Reading, delivering benefits relating to air quality, climate change, health & wellbeing and inclusive economic growth. The LEP has confirmed there will be further opportunities to submit additional bids to be included in the future pipeline of schemes. 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 Four Valleys development to the south of the M4.

### Third Thames Crossing East of Reading

- 4.21 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.
- 4.22 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. As set out in a separate report to this Committee, further work is required to understand the travel implications of the 'new normal' resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic to enable the draft Reading Transport Strategy 2036 to be updated with the latest information. This work will include a review of all current schemes within the strategy and will feed

into future work with neighbouring authorities through the Cross Thames Travel Group, including liaison with colleagues at the DfT and TfSE.

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

- 5.1 The delivery of the schemes outlined in this report will help to deliver the following priorities in the Council's Corporate Plan 2021/22:
- Healthy Environment
  - Thriving Communities
  - Inclusive Economy

## **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 Under the Equality Act 2010, Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, a public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, l 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 It will be necessary for the Council to enter into a funding agreement with GWR for the Reading West Railway Station Upgrade scheme to ensure GWR's compliance with the LEP's Capital Grant Letter and Conditions dated 18 December 2019, including delivery of the scheme in accordance with the business case submitted by the Council, to protect the Council in the event of clawback of funding by the LEP.

9.2 The Council will need to satisfy itself that the funding made available to GWR for the Reading West Railway upgrade is in compliance with the Subsidy Control regime.

9.3 The Stopping up process will involve making an application to the Secretary of State. In exercise of its powers under section 247 Town and Country Planning Act 1990 ("TCPA 1990"), the Secretary of State will carry out the full statutory consultation and it will make the Stopping up order if satisfied of the legal tests as contained in 247(1) TCPA 1990 as follows;

"The Secretary of State may by order authorise the stopping up or diversion of any highway outside Greater London if he is satisfied that it is necessary to do so in order to enable development to be carried out –

(a) in accordance with planning permission granted under Part III or section 293A, or

(b) by a government department".

9.4 As the Highway Authority, the Secretary of State will consult the Council on the proposals. Where any objection(s) received during the 28 day consultation period are not withdrawn, the Secretary of State, in accordance with Section 252 TCPA 1990 may hold a local inquiry unless it is satisfied that in the special circumstances of the case the holding of such an inquiry is unnecessary he may dispense with the inquiry.

## 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. Reading supported Wokingham's bid as part of the work of the Cross Thames Travel Group.

## **11. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

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