

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT BY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF ECONOMIC GROWTH AND NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

TO:	STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT, PLANNING & TRANSPORT COMMITTEE		
DATE:	16 NOVEMBER 2021	AGENDA ITEM:	
TITLE:	MAJOR TRANSPORT SCHEMES UPDATE		
LEAD COUNCILLOR:	TONY PAGE	PORTFOLIO:	STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT, PLANNING AND TRANSPORT
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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report provides an update on progress with the delivery of the current programme of major transport schemes in Reading, including:
- South Reading Mass Rapid Transit
 - Reading Green Park Station
 - Reading West Station Upgrade
 - Active Travel Fund - Shinfield Road
 - School Streets Programme

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.

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 £40m 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 4th May to 30th 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 impacts arising from Covid-19 and the 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.
- 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 Local Cycling & Walking Infrastructure Plan, Bus Service Improvement Plan and emerging Public Rights of Way Improvement Plan and Electric Vehicle Strategy.

4. THE PROPOSAL

South Reading Mass Rapid Transit

- 4.1 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.
- 4.2 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 an intelligent (Microprocessor Optimised Vehicle Actuation (MOVA)) method of control at the A33 / Bennet Road gyratory.
- 4.3 Construction of the current phase of works has been delayed initially due to Covid-19 and more latterly due to significant technical delays with implementing the enhanced traffic signal arrangements on Bennet Road gyratory. However, works are progressing on-site with a planned completion date of November 2021.

Reading Green Park Station

- 4.4 Reading Green Park Station is a 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.

- 4.5 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 (£9.5m), Section 106 developer contributions (£5.6m) and the New Station's Fund 2 (£5.2m), with planning permission granted in 2015.
- 4.6 Construction of the station and multi-modal interchange has continued on-site for the duration of the Covid-19 pandemic, however there have been impacts on the schedule resulting from covid and Brexit impacts (material shortages) which has resulted in further delays to the programme. 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

- 4.7 A Masterplan for significant enhancements to the station and wider interchange was prepared by the Council, in partnership with GWR and Network Rail. Funding of £3.1m has been secured from the Local Growth Fund and £200k Section 106 developer contributions for the current phase of works, which will deliver enhanced passenger facilities and security improvements in line with the overall vision for the station.
- 4.8 The current phase of works includes a new station building on the Oxford Road with associated highway alterations and interchange improvements, increased cycle parking and a new ticket gateline at the Tilehurst Road station entrance. The scheme will provide safety and security improvements at both entrances through enhanced CCTV coverage and lighting, which have been designed with input from the British Transport Police. Planning consent for the scheme was granted at the Council's Planning Applications Committee in January 2021.
- 4.9 Construction of the enhanced interchange and highway arrangements commenced on-site in February and is progressing well. Following completion of these works, GWR will take possession of the southern footway and commence their station building construction programme. The final completion date of the overall project is currently projected to be summer 2022.
- 4.10 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.

Active Travel Fund Tranche 2 - Shinfield Road

- 4.11 The objective of the Active Travel Fund is to deliver high-quality, segregated cycle infrastructure to encourage more people to cycle and walk. The Council was awarded £1.179m by the DfT in the second tranche of funding following submission of a comprehensive funding proposal, which was 100% of the indicative allocation for Reading.
- 4.12 Initial consultation to determine which scheme to take forward for delivery as part of the Tranche 2 programme was undertaken between 24th February and 23rd April 2021, resulting in the scheme at Shinfield Road being selected by this Committee in June. The scheme will provide a high-quality segregated cycle route and enhanced pedestrian crossing facilities on a key route between South Reading and Royal Berkshire Hospital, the University of Reading, local centres and Reading town centre.
- 4.13 The indicative timeline for delivery of this scheme is set out below:
- Initial consultation - Completed
 - Initial consultation results review and recommendation for scheme(s) to be taken forward - Completed
 - Committee approval to undertake statutory consultation - Completed
 - Detailed design - Autumn 2021
 - Public consultation - Autumn 2021
 - Update scheme designs - Winter 2021/22
 - Traffic Regulation Orders consultation - January/February 2022
 - Scheme delivery - from Spring 2022 onwards
- 4.14 Officers will continue to seek funding opportunities to deliver further active travel schemes in Reading, including the proposed segregated cycle scheme for the Bath Road which has been submitted to the DfT for funding through the third tranche of the Active Travel Fund.

School Streets Programme

- 4.15 The Council launched a School Street application process and guidance in spring 2020, after securing £175k from the DfT's Travel Demand Management Fund. To date, trial School Street schemes have been implemented at Park Lane Primary Junior School (Downing Road and Lambourne Close), Wilson Primary School (Wilson Road) and Thameside Primary School (Harley Road).
- 4.16 Monitoring of the first School Street scheme in Reading at Park Lane Primary Junior School, which opened in April this year, demonstrates that it has both made it safer for children travelling to school and significantly increased levels of active travel for children, parents and carers. Evidence gathered for this scheme to date shows the following positive impacts:
- 32% more children walk to/from school.
 - Car travel amongst parents has decreased by more than half since the School Street started.
 - In total, 26% of children are now travelling actively, which includes walking, cycling and scooting.

- Surveys identified only 1 additional car on the local network surrounding the school.
- The number of cyclists using Downing Road has increased by 25%.
- Traffic on the surrounding road, St Michaels Road, during peak periods has decreased by 8.7%.
- The local road network surrounding the School Street has not had any major issue with parking moving to other areas.

4.17 Preparations are currently underway for a further joint School Street trial scheme for Maiden Erleigh School in Reading, UTC Reading and Alfred Sutton Primary School on Crescent Road. The scheme has been delayed, however it is due to commence in early 2021.

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 2020-25, 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.

6.2 The Climate Impact Assessment tool has been used to assess the proposal as set out within this report, resulting in an overall Net Medium Positive impact. This is due to our major transport scheme programme being focused on encouraging the use of sustainable transport, walking and cycling as attractive alternatives to the private car. The programme will enhance facilities to encourage more use of sustainable transport and active travel options, and therefore reduce the use of the private car and resulting congestion, carbon emissions and other air quality issues. There are inevitably emissions associated with the construction of these major schemes, however we are working to reduce these short-term impacts in order to achieve the longer-term modal switch benefits.

6.3 In addition, the delivery of the major transport schemes as set out within this report form a vital part of our overall transport and climate emergency strategies, which has achieved considerable success in recent years including bus usage in Reading being the second 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 schemes included within the current major transport scheme programme have and will be communicated to the local community through public exhibitions, consultations and Council meetings as set out within the report.
- 7.2 Statutory consultation will be conducted in accordance with appropriate legislation, including Traffic Regulation Orders as appropriate. 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 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, and
 - 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 major transport scheme programme.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 There are no direct legal implications resulting from this report.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 External grant funding for the delivery of the current major transport scheme programme has been secured from various sources, including the LEP and the DfT. All of the schemes as set out within the report are included within the Council's overall Capital Programme, except for the School Streets programme which is fully funded via a revenue grant. The capital schemes are monitored regularly and reported to Committee as part of the Council's Capital Programme, including the funding profile for each scheme.
- 10.2 The School Streets programme is being delivered through the award of £175k revenue funding from the DfT's Travel Demand Management Fund. The purpose of this funding is to manage travel demand following the Covid lockdowns and to encourage a mode shift towards more sustainable modes. School Streets is one element of this work which includes a programme of incentivisation and information initiatives with a particular focus on walking and cycling.
- 10.3 The total funding package for the schemes included within this report is set out in the table below:

Source of Funding	Capital (£'000)	Revenue (£'000)	Total (£'000)
LEP grant funding	27,300	-	27,300
DfT grant funding	6,400	375	6,775

Other external funding	550	-	550
RBC funding (S106 / CIL / borrowing)	9,400	-	9,400
Total	43,650	375	44,025

11. BACKGROUND PAPERS

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