

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT BY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF ECONOMIC GROWTH AND
NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

| | | | |
|------------------|---|--------------|--|
| TO: | STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT, PLANNING AND TRANSPORT COMMITTEE | | |
| DATE: | 16 NOVEMBER 2022 | AGENDA ITEM: | |
| TITLE: | STRATEGIC TRANSPORT SCHEMES UPDATE | | |
| LEAD COUNCILLOR: | TONY PAGE | PORTFOLIO: | CLIMATE CHANGE AND TRANSPORT |
| SERVICE: | PLANNING, TRANSPORT AND PUBLIC PROTECTION | WARDS: | BOROUGHWIDE |
| LEAD OFFICER: | CHRIS MADDOCKS | TEL: | 0118 937 4950 |
| JOB TITLE: | STRATEGIC TRANSPORT MANAGER | E-MAIL: | chris.maddocks@reading.gov.uk |

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 This report provides an update on progress with the delivery of the current programme of strategic transport schemes in Reading, including:

- South Reading Mass Rapid Transit
- Reading Green Park Station
- Reading West Station Upgrade
- Tilehurst Station Upgrade
- Active Travel Fund Tranche 2 - Shinfield Road
- Active Travel Fund Tranche 3 - Bath Road
- Active Travel Capability Fund
- School Streets Programme

1.2 **Appendix A - Active Travel Tranche 3 - Bath Road Scheme Concept Designs**

2. RECOMMENDED ACTION

2.1 To note the progress made on the delivery of the current programme of strategic transport schemes as outlined in this report.

2.2 To grant scheme and spend approval for the Active Travel Fund - Tranche 3 scheme, which will provide segregated cycle facilities and pedestrian enhancements on the Bath Road between the town centre and Berkeley Avenue.

- 2.3 To grant approval to undertake the necessary procurements to deliver the Active Travel Tranche 3 scheme and to delegate authority to the Assistant Director Planning, Transport and Public Protection, in consultation with the Lead Councillor for Climate Strategy and Transport, Director of Finance and Assistant Director of Legal & Democratic Services to award any such corresponding contracts.**

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 approximately £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 (through Section 106 agreements), investment from Network Rail and GWR, and Council borrowing.
- 3.2 The Council's current Local Transport Plan (LTP) sets out the 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 are being monitored, in addition to updated LTP Guidance which is due to be published by the DfT next spring, further monitoring is currently being undertaken to understand these travel changes to ensure the new LTP is updated with the latest information before being finalised. In addition, it is anticipated that the new DfT guidance will be specifically linked to future funding opportunities, therefore it will be important to ensure that it fully conforms to the new guidance prior to finalising the LTP strategy.
- 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 the emerging Public Rights of Way Improvement Plan and Electric Vehicle Charging 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 MereOak 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 1-4 of the scheme successfully delivered. Phase 4 has recently been constructed on-site, including 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 Funding for phase 5 of the scheme has been indicatively secured as part of the BSIP programme of works (an update on progress is provided as a separate agenda item to this Committee). This phase will link up existing outbound bus lanes delivered through previous phases through the construction of an additional lane over the River Kennet, between the junctions with Rose Kiln Lane (South) and Kennet Island.

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. Following a review of scheme progress to date, additional funding of £2.25m from Great Western Railway and £2.015m from Network Rail has been secured to support the delivery of both Reading Green Park and the Reading West Station Upgrade scheme.
- 4.6 Construction of the station and multi-modal interchange has continued on-site for the duration of the 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. Construction works for the station and multi-modal interchange are now substantially complete, and therefore, supported by partners from the railway industry, the project has entered a period of thorough testing and authorisation prior to the station's 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 which is currently scheduled for early 2023.

Reading West Station Upgrade

- 4.7 A Masterplan setting out a vision for significant enhancements to the station and wider interchange has been prepared by the Council, in partnership with GWR and Network Rail, which includes enhanced passenger facilities, security improvements and enhancements to both the Oxford Road and Tilehurst Road station entrances.
- 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 last year and are now substantially complete, with the remaining work to be undertaken following construction of the new station building. GWR have now taken possession of the southern footway of the Oxford Road entrance and have commenced their station building construction programme, alongside works to deliver a new entrance and gateline at the Tilehurst Road entrance. The overall project is currently projected to be completed by summer 2023.
- 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. Network Rail have also stated that a full platform rebuild would be 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.

Tilehurst Station Upgrade

- 4.11 The Council has been working with Network Rail and GWR to progress a series of improvements to upgrade passenger facilities at Tilehurst Station. Work undertaken to date includes submitting a funding bid to TVB LEP in partnership with GWR, and working with Network Rail to progress accessibility enhancements at the station.
- 4.12 A decision on TVB LEP funding bid is pending, however Network Rail has successfully secured funding to install lifts at the station. The lifts will be added to the existing station footbridge which had passive provision designed in, which when complete will provide step free access to all platforms at the station.
- 4.13 The indicative timeline for delivery of the lift improvement works is set out below:
- Concept design and site surveys - Complete
 - Design & build contractor appointment - Complete
 - Detailed design - Complete
 - Design approvals - Winter 2022
 - Construction phase plan - Winter 2022
 - Stakeholder communications (including drop-in sessions) - early 2023
 - Construction commences on site - early 2023

Active Travel Fund Tranche 2 - Shinfield Road

- 4.14 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.
- 4.15 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 2021. 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.
- 4.16 A public consultation on the latest scheme designs was undertaken between 26 October to 6 December 2021. This included information, maps and a survey on the Council's website, a public drop-in event at the University of Reading and presentations and workshop sessions with local user groups. Feedback from this consultation has been incorporated into the final detailed designs for the scheme and the statutory consultation on Traffic Regulation Orders (TROs) to implement double yellow line parking restrictions along the route was undertaken between 12th May and 2nd June and was approved by the Traffic Management Sub-Committee on 15th June 2022.
- 4.17 Delivery of the scheme has commenced on-site, initially starting at the University / Christchurch Green end of the route, by the Council's in-house Highways delivery team. However, it should be noted that due to resource limitations a degree of sub-contracting will be required in order to deliver the scheme. The degree of external support will be reviewed on an on-going basis during the scheme delivery phase.
- 4.18 The indicative timeline for delivery of this scheme is set out below:
- Initial consultation - Complete
 - Initial consultation results review and recommendation for scheme(s) to be taken forward - Complete
 - Committee approval to undertake statutory consultation - Complete
 - Update concept designs - Complete
 - Public consultation - Complete
 - Traffic Regulation Orders consultation - Complete
 - Update detailed designs - Complete
 - Scheme delivery - In progress (commenced October 2022)
 - Scheme completion - early 2023

Active Travel Fund Tranche 3 - Bath Road

- 4.19 Following successfully securing Tranche 2 funding from the Active Travel Fund, in March 2022 the DfT awarded the Council £1.3m from the third tranche of funding to deliver a scheme of segregated cycle infrastructure and pedestrian improvements on the Bath Road, between the town centre and the junction with Berkeley Avenue. Funding for the scheme will also include £200k from the Integrated Transport Block (ITB) grant from the DfT.

- 4.20 Initial consultation on the concept designs for the Bath Road scheme was undertaken alongside the other active travel schemes between 24th February and 23rd April 2021. This consultation resulted in strong support for the scheme, with 60% of respondents saying they supported or strongly supported the proposed segregated cycle lanes. A further consultation was undertaken between 7th July and 1st August 2022, including a public drop-in event at Reading Association for the Blind, Walford Hall, Carey Street on Wednesday 13th July. The feedback received through these consultations is currently being used to prepare the detailed designs for the scheme (the previous concept designs are provided at **Appendix A**), including any elements of the proposals that will need to be taken through a TRO statutory consultation process.
- 4.21 The indicative timeline for delivery of this scheme is set out below:
- Initial consultation - Complete
 - Initial consultation results review and recommendation for scheme(s) to be taken forward - Complete
 - Further consultation - Complete (July/August 2022)
 - Update designs and surveys - Complete (October 2022)
 - SEPT Committee scheme and spend approval - November 2022
 - Detailed designs complete - Winter 2022
 - Traffic Management Sub-Committee statutory consultation approval - January 2023
 - Traffic Regulation Orders statutory consultation - Spring 2023
 - Update scheme designs - Spring 2023
 - Scheme delivery - from Summer 2023 onwards

Active Travel Capability Fund

- 4.22 The Council was awarded £249,454 by the DfT in August 2021 from the Active Travel Capability Fund. This is revenue grant funding to enable a programme of schemes and initiatives to be developed and delivered aimed at supporting a shift in travel behaviour to active travel, to complement the segregated route facilities being delivered through the Active Travel Fund capital grant funding.
- 4.23 Delivery of the programme of initiatives is well underway, including the provision of adult cycle training and cycle maintenance training courses to complement the training being provided to children in schools through Bikeability cycle training. The Council is working in partnership with Sustrans to deliver a behavioural change programme through a dedicated officer as a joint Sustrans resource in partnership with Bracknell Forest Council. Activities undertaken to date include engagement through led rides and walks, supporting schools with the delivery of Modeshift STARS travel planning activities, developing a series of active travel communications and working with partners to support events including Reading Cycle Festival and the Sustrans Big Walk and Wheel. A research programme will also be undertaken to identify the key barriers to encouraging walking and cycling in Reading.
- 4.24 This Capability Fund programme of works includes the delivery of a ‘pop-up’ secure cycle parking hub in the town centre, following representations to the Council from local groups with a strong desire to be involved in the delivery and on-going management of such a facility. Following the award of funding from the DfT, the Council has worked to secure a prominent town centre location for

this facility, secure planning permission which was approved on 2nd November 2022, and progress the legal process to finalise a lease agreement which is currently being undertaken. The Council has also sourced proposals for the fit-out of the facility and discussions are on-going with local groups regarding the on-going day to day management and operation of the facility.

- 4.25 The final element of this programme of works is an update to Reading's Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan. This work will ensure the strategy is consistent with new national cycling guidance including Gear Change (the UK's vision for cycling and walking) and Local Transport Note 1/20, and this work will put the Council in the best possible position to secure external grant funding for future walking and cycling schemes in Reading.

School Streets Programme

- 4.26 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), Thameside Primary School (Harley Road) and most recently on Crescent Road in East Reading in February 2022.
- 4.27 The scheme on Crescent Road, which is a joint scheme for Maiden Erleigh School in Reading, UTC Reading and Alfred Sutton Primary School, was initially running during the morning period only (8.15-9am), however the schools have also been able to also run the scheme during the afternoon period (2.45-3.30pm) which commenced on 8th November 2022.
- 4.28 All School Street schemes have initially been established as trials under an Experimental Traffic Regulation Order (ETRO). The ETRO includes a 6-month statutory consultation period to provide the opportunity for comments and objections to the scheme to be submitted to the Council. The Council's Traffic Management Sub-Committee approved for the ETROs at Park Lane Junior, Wilson and Thameside Primary schools to be made permanent on 15th June 2022.
- 4.29 Applications to establish new School Street schemes are being encouraged, alongside monitoring of the existing scheme to identify any improvements which can be made to help encourage an increase in levels of walking and cycling for children, parents and carers.

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 the 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 Work to establish an Experimental Traffic Regulation Order (ETRO) for the School Street scheme at Crescent Road has been completed. The Experimental order is made under the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 and has been advertised in accordance with the procedure laid down by Local Authorities Traffic Orders (Procedure)(England and Wales) Regulations 1996. Any comments or objections to the order can be made during the first 6 months of operation, after which the Council will consider and decide to either continue with the experiment for a further 12 months, remove the experiment or make the scheme permanent.

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, update to reflect the additional funding recently secured:

| Source of Funding | Capital (£'000) | Revenue (£'000) | Total (£'000) |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|---------------|
| LEP grant funding | 27,300 | - | 27,300 |
| DfT grant funding | 7,700 | 375 | 8,075 |
| Other external funding | 4,785 | - | 4,785 |
| RBC funding (S106 / CIL / borrowing) | 9,400 | - | 9,400 |
| Total | 49,185 | 375 | 49,560 |

11. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 11.1 None