

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT BY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF ECONOMIC GROWTH AND NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

TO:	STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT, PLANNING AND TRANSPORT COMMITTEE		
DATE:	23 MARCH 2023	AGENDA ITEM:	9
TITLE:	STRATEGIC TRANSPORT SCHEMES UPDATE		
LEAD COUNCILLOR:	TONY PAGE	PORTFOLIO:	CLIMATE CHANGE AND TRANSPORT
SERVICE:	PLANNING, TRANSPORT AND PUBLIC PROTECTION	WARDS:	BOROUGHWIDE
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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:
- Bus Service Improvement Plan Programme
 - 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

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 note confirmation has been secured from the Department for Transport for the full allocation of £26.263m grant funding for the Bus Service Improvement Plan. This represents the third highest funding award (by head of population) in the country.
- 2.3 To note the funding award of £124,250 from the Active Travel Capability Fund 2022/23, which will enable the continuation of the Council's

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 in the form of grants received from Central Government and the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP), developer contributions (through Section 106 agreements), and investment from Network Rail and GWR.
- 3.2 The Council's current Local Transport Plan (LTP) sets out the transport strategy for Reading up to 2026. Development of a new LTP is on-going as new guidance from the DfT is anticipated shortly, with the core principles of the strategy linked to 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. The strategic transport schemes as set out within this report are fully aligned with both the existing and new LTPs, and delivery of each of these individual schemes is a vital part of achieving the overall vision and objectives of each strategy. 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 Bus Service Improvement Plan, Local Cycling & Walking Infrastructure Plan and the Public Rights of Way Improvement Plan.

4. THE PROPOSAL

Bus Service Improvement Plan Programme

- 4.1 The Council published and adopted its Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) in October 2021, setting out our plans to enhance services and encourage more people to travel by bus in Reading. The BSIP was aligned with the objectives of the National Bus Strategy 'Bus Back Better' and in April 2022 Government announced an indicative funding award of £26.263m for Reading, following a review of all BSIPs submitted by local authorities.
- 4.2 Following the indicative funding award, discussions have been undertaken with local bus operators to agree the key schemes and initiatives to be delivered through the BSIP programme. As required by Government, the Council has developed an Enhanced Partnership (EP) agreement with all local operators and

convened an EP Board with the major operators to oversee the development and delivery of the BSIP programme.

- 4.3 Detailed discussions have been undertaken with DfT officials resulting in the EP Board agreeing an EP Variation in December 2022, which sets out more detail on the various scheme and initiatives to be delivered with the initial phase of Government funding. Subsequently, the DfT confirmed the full funding allocation of £26.263m to Reading in January 2023 meaning delivery of the programme can commence following this confirmation of funding. The overall grant consists of £15.939m capital and £10.324m revenue funding.
- 4.4 The BSIP programme includes a range of capital and revenue measures to encourage greater passenger usage in Reading. The EP Scheme Variation sets out our commitment to deliver, in partnership with the operators, the schemes that the DfT have awarded grant funding for as set out below, although it should be noted that the package of capital schemes will be subject to public consultation:

Capital Schemes

- Outbound bus lane on A329 Oxford Road between Zinzan Street and George Street.
- Outbound bus lane on A329 Oxford Road between Pangbourne Street and Norcot Junction.
- Outbound bus lane on A4 Bath Road from Circuit Lane to Granville Road.
- Inbound bus lane on A327 Southampton Street.
- Inbound bus lane on A4 London Road between Sidmouth Street and London Street.
- Inbound bus lane on A4 London Road between borough boundary and Cemetery Junction.
- Phase 5 of the South Reading MRT (Mass Rapid Transit) scheme, joining up previous outbound sections of the scheme between Rose Kiln Lane (South) and Kennet Island.
- Improvements to passenger facilities at MereOak Park & Ride site.
- Package of bus signal priority measures at key junctions to complement new bus priority lanes.
- Package of town centre public transport infrastructure enhancements.

Revenue Initiatives

- Introduction of a multi-operator fares reduction ticketing scheme.
- South Reading bus service enhancements, including the continuation of Route 9 services.
- Extend and improve frequency of Buzz 42 bus service.
- Park and ride service enhancements for the Royal Berkshire Hospital and the University of Reading.
- Develop proposals for future bus priority measures to assist with routes to and through Caversham.
- Bus passenger data information enhancements.
- Management of the EP arrangements and BSIP programme delivery support.

- 4.5 The initial focus of work has been on developing a multi-operator fares discount ticketing scheme, preparing designs for the next phase of works for the South Reading MRT scheme, working with the Royal Berkshire Hospital on improvements to their shuttle services running from MereOak and Thames Valley Park Park & Ride sites, and preparing the procurement documentation to appoint an operator for the continued provision of contracted Route 9 services in South Reading.
- 4.6 Detailed work has been undertaken with the local operators through the EP arrangements to develop and agree the fares discount scheme which was launched on Monday 13 March. The new discounted 'Reading All-Bus' day travel ticket enables passengers to use services on all major local bus companies including Reading Buses, Thames Valley Buses, Arriva and Thames Travel with the same ticket, for an initially reduced rate of £3.50 on bus (or £3.40 from any of the bus companies' Apps). The adult day ticket also allows travel on all bus services in the Greater Reading Area for the rest of the day, making use of new 'tap on, tap off' technology on the buses to ensure no one pays more than the set fare cap regardless of the amount of travel undertaken in a day, similar to the system which is currently in operation in London. The overall objective of the fares offer is to attract more passengers onto bus services in Reading by making them cheaper and simpler to use, and a comms campaign launched the introduction of the scheme which complements the £2 national single fare scheme which has recently been extended by Government to run for an additional 3 months until the end of June 2023.
- 4.7 The Committee will be kept updated on the development and delivery of the individual schemes and initiatives which make up the overall BSIP programme through regular update reports.

South Reading Mass Rapid Transit

- 4.8 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.
- 4.9 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.
- 4.10 Funding for phase 5 of the scheme has been secured as part of the overall BSIP grant funding award. 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

- 4.11 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.
- 4.12 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.
- 4.13 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 and a further announcement is expected shortly to confirm details, however this is subject to the final approvals being secured and GWR's fit out of the station building being completed.

Reading West Station Upgrade

- 4.14 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.
- 4.15 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.
- 4.16 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 taken possession of the southern footway of the Oxford Road entrance and construction works for the new passenger building on the Oxford Road and works to deliver a new entrance and gateline at the Tilehurst

Road entrance are progressing well. The overall project is currently projected to be completed by late spring 2023.

- 4.17 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

- 4.18 The Council has been working with Network Rail and GWR to progress a series of improvements to upgrade passenger facilities at Tilehurst Station and funding is being sought to develop an agreed Masterplan of enhancements, both within the station and the wider interchange / access arrangements, with both organisations.
- 4.19 Network Rail has secured funding to deliver the first phase of the overall Masterplan works to make accessibility improvements through the installation of lifts at the station. The lifts will be added to the existing station footbridge which had been designed with passive provision for lifts, which when complete will provide step free access to all platforms at the station.
- 4.20 The latest timeline provided by Network Rail for delivery of the lift improvement works at the station is set out below:
- Concept design and site surveys - Complete
 - Design & build contractor appointment - Complete
 - Detailed design - Complete
 - Network Rail design approvals - Spring 2023
 - prior approval planning application - Spring 2023
 - Stakeholder communications - Spring 2023
 - Construction commences on site - Spring 2023
 - Construction completion - Autumn 2023

- 4.21 Network Rail has recently issued a press release regarding this scheme here - <https://www.networkrailmediacentre.co.uk/news/tilehurst-station-set-for-step-free-access>.

Active Travel Fund Tranche 2 - Shinfield Road

- 4.22 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.

- 4.23 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.
- 4.24 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.
- 4.25 Delivery of the scheme is progressing well on-site, with the initial construction works starting at the University / Christchurch Green end of the route. The work is predominately being undertaken by the Council's in-house Highways delivery team, however it should be noted that due to resource limitations a degree of sub-contracting is required and the degree of external support is being reviewed on an on-going basis by the Highways team.
- 4.26 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 - Summer 2023

Active Travel Fund Tranche 3 - Bath Road

- 4.27 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.
- 4.28 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. Feedback received through these consultations has been used to prepare the detailed designs for the scheme, including elements of the scheme that require a TRO statutory consultation which has now concluded and the TROs were approved by the Council's Traffic Management Sub-Committee in March 2023.

- 4.29 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 - Complete (November 2022)
 - Traffic Management Sub-Committee statutory consultation approval - Complete (January 2023)
 - Traffic Regulation Orders statutory consultation - Complete (March 2023)
 - Update scheme designs following consultation - Spring 2023
 - Scheme delivery - from Summer 2023 onwards

Active Travel Capability Fund

- 4.30 The Council was awarded £249,454 by the DfT in August 2021 from the Active Travel Capability Fund 21/22 and a further £124,250 was awarded from the fund in 22/23, with both amounts being the fully indicative funding award available to Reading subject to a successfully funding proposal. 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.
- 4.31 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.
- 4.32 In addition, the funding has recently been extended to support the Innovation Valley Rewards App which encourages the use of sustainable travel through earning points for walking, running, cycling, bus or train travel. Once users start earning points they can be redeemed for vouchers at high street stores, restaurants and supermarkets - or donated to charity. The App also tracks the how long someone had spent travelling actively that week, routes travelled and the time taken, calories burned and the pollution avoided through limiting

Carbon dioxide (CO₂) and Nitrogen dioxide (NO₂). Different challenges are also run through the app, for instance the Reading Bus Builder Challenge which ran throughout February which enabled users to earn more tickets on the weekly draw every time they travelled by bus.

- 4.33 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.
- 4.34 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

- 4.35 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.
- 4.36 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.
- 4.37 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.
- 4.38 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 The vast majority of the Council's current programme of strategic transport schemes is funded by external grants which have been secured from various sources, including the LEP and the DfT. All of the capital schemes as set out within the report are included within the Council's Capital Programme including the funding profile for each scheme. Both the capital and revenue schemes are monitored regularly as part of the overall internal budget monitoring processes.

11. BACKGROUND PAPERS

11.1 None