



**29 June 2023**

<b>Title</b>	Reading Transport Strategy 2040 – Draft for Consultation
<b>Purpose of the report</b>	To make a decision
<b>Report status</b>	Public report
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<b>Lead councillor</b>	Cllr John Ennis
<b>Corporate priority</b>	Healthy Environment
<b>Recommendations</b>	<p>The Committee is asked to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Note the work which has been undertaken to date to prepare the draft Reading Transport Strategy 2040.</li> <li>2. Provide approval to undertake a 12-week statutory public consultation on the draft strategy.</li> </ol>

## **1. Executive summary**

- 1.1. The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of the work which has been undertaken to prepare the draft Reading Transport Strategy 2040, the new Local Transport Plan (LTP) for the borough, and to seek approval to undertake a 12-week statutory public consultation on the draft strategy.

## **2. Policy context**

- 2.1. It is a statutory duty for all Local Transport Authorities to produce and keep under regular review an LTP under the Transport Act 2000, as amended by the Local Transport Act 2008. Reading's existing LTP for the period 2011-26 was adopted by Council in March 2011. Significant progress has been made with delivery of the currently LTP and the majority of schemes and initiatives within it have now been delivered.
- 2.2. Preparation of the new LTP, the Reading Transport Strategy 2040, commenced in 2019. This included an initial visioning consultation which was undertaken between July and September 2019 seeking views on the proposed key principles to underpin development of the strategy. Feedback received from the consultation demonstrated strong support for the proposed vision, objectives and key themes for the strategy, which focused on providing attractive alternatives to the private car through the provision of high-quality public transport, walking and cycling facilities.
- 2.3. Development of the strategy continued in line with the feedback received from the visioning consultation. Despite the onset of the Covid pandemic, the decision was taken to proceed with the statutory consultation which was undertaken between May and August 2020. Alongside the strategy, the statutory consultation included seeking views on the Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA) which focused on the environmental, equalities and health considerations of the strategy.
- 2.4. The consultation provided valuable feedback on the detailed policies, schemes and initiatives included within the draft strategy. However, the on-going nature of the pandemic and uncertainty regarding the implications for future travel behaviour led to the decision being taken to pause development of the strategy at that time. This

coincided with a period of significant additional requirements and associated funding opportunities emerging from Government for local authorities, principally through the National Bus Strategy – Bus Back Better, and Gear Change - A Bold Vision for Cycling and Walking. Our progress in securing substantial funding and delivering schemes through these workstreams is regularly reported to this Committee through the Strategic Transport Schemes Update reports.

- 2.5. The Department for Transport (DfT) is preparing new statutory LTP guidance for local authorities, with the view that compliance with this guidance will be a key factor in future funding decisions made by the Department. The latest indications are that this guidance will be launched in summer 2023. It is envisaged that a new element to the guidance will be a requirement to quantify the carbon reduction benefits resulting from delivery of the LTP, alongside the existing requirement to assess the environmental implications of the strategy more broadly. The DfT has indicated that Government expects all Local Transport Authorities to prepare a new LTP in line with the new guidance 'by the end of the current Parliament'.
- 2.6. The Council's new Corporate Plan has established three themes for the years 2022/25. These themes are:
  - Healthy Environment
  - Thriving Communities
  - Inclusive Economy
- 2.7. These themes are underpinned by "Our Foundations" explaining the ways we work at the Council:
  - People first
  - Digital transformation
  - Building self-reliance
  - Getting the best value
  - Collaborating with others
- 2.8. Full details of the Council's Corporate Plan and the projects which will deliver these priorities are published on the [Council's website](#). These priorities and the Corporate Plan demonstrate how the Council meets its legal obligation to be efficient, effective and economical.

### **3. The proposal**

- 3.1. The draft Reading Transport Strategy 2040 sets out an ambitious vision to create healthier, greener and more equal communities through the future provision of travel options in Reading. The strategy is focused on promoting sustainable transport options as a realistic alternative to the private car, setting out how transport facilities and services in Reading will be developed to 2040 to help achieve our wider objectives for the town, including the Reading 2050 Vision and the net zero carbon ambition by 2030.
- 3.2. It is acknowledged that it is not possible for every car journey to be replaced by a more sustainable mode, for instance people may need to drive on occasions due to reasons relating to work, family, safety, gender differences or equality issues. Therefore, the strategy includes the objective of a transition to electric vehicles in Reading which have a significantly reduced impact on carbon emissions than diesel and petrol equivalents. However, it is clear that this transition alone will not achieve the overall objectives of the strategy as electric vehicles still produce particulates which lead to poor local air quality, do not reduce traffic congestion nor encourage more active travel with the associated health and wellbeing benefits.
- 3.3. A key focus of the strategy is tackling social inequalities in Reading through the provision of affordable transport solutions to enable access to education, training, employment and leisure opportunities for everyone. Further important themes of the strategy relate to carbon reduction and improved air quality, health and wellbeing,

economic growth and making use of the latest technologies to be at the forefront of innovation.

- 3.4. The Covid pandemic has had a significant impact on travel behaviours in Reading and the draft strategy has been updated with a view to longer-term behavioural changes which have resulted from the pandemic. In particular, public health messaging regarding the importance of active travel and the greater flexibility for office workers to work from home has created a unique opportunity to improve air quality and promote cycling and walking through the provision of enhanced facilities. The transport strategy has a vital role to play in enabling a 'green recovery' through a model of inclusive, green growth to help create the jobs of the future in environmental technology and other green industries.

#### Analysis of travel patterns

- 3.5. Our latest analysis of travel behavioural changes resulting from the pandemic which have been reflected in the updated draft strategy are set out below:
- Variances in the number of trips undertaken today in comparison to pre-Covid levels, dependent upon trip purpose.
  - A reduction in the number of trips undertaken for work and retail purposes, alongside a reduction in travel to major transport hubs such as rail stations.
  - An increase in the number of trips undertaken for leisure purposes (particularly visits to parks) and a slight increase in grocery and pharmacy trips.
  - Current levels of congestion are lower overall in comparison to 2019, especially during the weekday AM and PM peak periods.
  - A flattening out of the AM and PM peak periods, which still exist however the difference between peak and off-peak is less pronounced.
  - The PM peak period appears to be more evenly spread and has been brought forward to 3-6pm, in comparison to 2019 which was more severe between 4-7pm.
  - A decrease in the overall number of trips to/from Reading town centre, however recent increases in public transport and cycle trips means travel by sustainable modes has over 70% mode share of all trips to and from the town centre (with the cordon of the town centre being the IDR).

#### Key content

- 3.6. The draft strategy for public consultation includes the following main sections:
- Vision & Objectives – this sets out the overall vision to transform sustainable travel options in Reading through the five core themes of: creating a clean and green Reading; supporting healthy lifestyles; enabling sustainable and inclusive growth; connecting people and places; and embracing smart solutions.
  - About Reading – this section provides an overview of Reading as a place, describing how the town is a major employment centre and leisure destination with excellent transport connectivity, however also a town which suffers from significant levels of inequality.
  - Challenges & Opportunities – sets out the key issues the strategy is seeking to overcome, which include improving air quality; reducing congestion; providing affordable and accessible travel for all; removing barriers to healthy lifestyles; achieving good accessibility to local facilities and employment opportunities; accommodating sustainable development and adapting to the future.
  - Our Policies – the strategy includes a suite of policies covering a wide range of topics which add more detail to the key themes of the document. The policies

set the guiding principles for the strategy which should be followed to help ensure the overall vision and objectives are achieved.

- Our Schemes & Initiatives – the individual schemes and initiatives within the strategy have been designed to work together and complement each other, with each adding value to the overall package. The strategy includes a range of measures from localised small-scale enhancements to strategic cross-boundary schemes; with a programme focused on multi-modal, public transport, active travel and network management interventions. In addition, a comprehensive programme of communication, engagement and training initiatives are included in the strategy, focused on key destinations, employment sites and schools throughout the borough.
- The schemes and initiatives contained within the strategy have been developed to ensure they contribute towards wider Council objectives including health and wellbeing, air quality and the climate emergency. The key headline schemes include a package of public transport enhancements and priority measures (both bus and rail) on key corridors linked to mobility hubs on the edge of the urban area; developing a network of segregated cycle routes and enhanced pedestrian facilities to encourage more levels of walking and cycling; more efficient management of the highway network; improving cross river travel options to mitigate the negative impacts resulting from the limited existing river crossings; and a policy to review potential demand management measures. The combination of these interventions will all contribute towards increasing levels of sustainable travel and ultimately help to achieve our overall vision for travel in Reading.
- Funding & Implementation – this section includes a high-level delivery plan with indicative timescales for implementation of each component of the overall strategy (subject to funding availability). Delivery of the strategy will be split between major schemes, packages of smaller measures delivered through neighbourhood area action plans, and on-going revenue initiatives.
- Partnerships & Stakeholders – this section emphasises the importance of effective partnership working and gives a clear commitment to work with all key stakeholders to deliver the strategy. This is vitally important to ensure each individual element of the strategy is delivered, as it is the combination of initiatives which will enable the overall vision to be achieved.
- Monitoring & Review – this final section includes an ambitious set of targets to ensure progress is regularly monitored in order to remain on track towards successfully achieving the overall vision and core objectives of the strategy.

#### Key updates

3.7. The draft strategy has been substantially updated since the previous public consultation, however the core vision and underlying principles running through the strategy remain valid and have not been changed. The key updates to the document, which include feedback received through the previous consultation and to reflect changes to longer-term travel patterns and choices resulting from the pandemic, include the following:

- The period of the strategy has been updated to 2023-40 to reflect the latest timescales for finalisation of the strategy and to more closely align with the emerging Local Plan update.
- Updates have been made throughout the strategy to reflect recent progress which has been made including relating to the Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) funding and work programme, work to deliver segregated cycle facilities and development of the infrastructure required to transition to electric vehicles.

- The policies within the document have been updated to reflect the latest developments in technology, including strengthening references to the provision of enhanced sustainable travel options. In addition, a policy regarding UAVs (Unmanned Aerial Vehicles), or drones, has been added to demonstrate its potential for reducing traffic, particularly freight, over the duration of the strategy.
  - A number of schemes have been updated, particularly to place greater emphasis on prioritising road space to enable more segregated walking and cycling routes and bus priority measures to be delivered, and to highlight the need to work closely with partners and key stakeholders to overcome the issues resulting from through traffic and the limited number of existing river crossings in Reading.
  - A more ambitious set of performance targets have been included to monitor the delivery of the strategy and track progress against achievement of the overall vision and objectives.
  - A number of factual updates have been made throughout the document to reflect changes since preparation of the previous version of the strategy, for instance to reflect the latest developments in local and national policies.
- 3.8. In addition to the draft strategy itself, a significant amount of work has been undertaken in developing sub-strategies since the previous public consultation. This includes more detailed plans as set out in the Council's Bus Service Improvement Plan, Rights of Way Improvement Plan and draft Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Strategy. These sub-strategies have been prepared to align with and contribute towards delivery of the vision and objectives as set out in the overarching transport strategy.

#### Statutory consultation

- 3.9. A fundamental element of development of the draft strategy to date has been engagement and consultation with a wide range of stakeholders, local interest groups and residents. The overarching vision and key principles underpinning the strategy were overwhelmingly supported in the initial consultation, including radical policies to guide development of the town's transport network such as re-allocating road space for the use of sustainable modes. The subsequent consultation on the draft strategy at the time built upon these strong foundations with valuable feedback and suggestions which have been reflected in the updates to the detailed proposals contained within the draft strategy.
- 3.10. It is proposed that the statutory consultation builds on the previous consultation and engagement activities undertaken by providing an opportunity to review the updated document and provide further feedback on the draft strategy. The consultation would be launched with a press release which will form the basis of promotional messages circulated to existing contacts, networks and local user groups. Key promotional activities to be undertaken as part of the consultation will include: a social media campaign; advertising on digital screens including those in Council buildings; engagement with key stakeholders including neighbouring authorities and local user and interest groups; engagement activities with local schools and a consultation webpage including survey. People who wish to provide feedback on the draft strategy will be encouraged to do so via an online survey hosted on the Council's website, however other methods will also be available as required.
- 3.11. It is a statutory requirement under the current DfT guidance for the consultation on the draft strategy to be open for 12 weeks. In addition, the statutory Integrated Impact Assessment report which assesses the overall strategy in relation to its environmental, equality and health impacts must also form part of the consultation. This work is being undertaken in parallel through an iterative process to ensure feedback from the initial assessments have been used to develop the main strategy. In addition, there are a number of statutory consultees we will engage through the consultation process, including:

- Transport operators;
  - Neighbouring local authorities;
  - Natural England;
  - Environment Agency; and
  - English Heritage.
- 3.12. It is anticipated that the new LTP guidance will be released by the DfT in summer 2023. The proposed period of public consultation on the draft strategy will enable a review to be undertaken of compliance with the new guidance when it is released, and any updates will be incorporated within the updated strategy alongside the incorporation of feedback from the consultation, such as any amendments required through the updated guidance on carbon quantification assessment.
- 3.13. In conclusion, the draft Reading Transport Strategy 2040 addresses the key challenges and opportunities facing Reading and will put the town in the best possible position to ensure transport can play its part in achieving wider objectives relating to health and wellbeing, climate change, economic recovery and addressing inequalities. The strategy is building on strong foundations of high levels of public transport, walking and cycling in the town, however significant challenges and opportunities still need to be addressed and the strategy includes a comprehensive programme of policies, schemes and initiatives which are aligned to the overall vision and wider objectives.
- 3.14. Subject to approval being granted by the Committee to undertake the statutory consultation, the next steps for delivery of the final strategy will be to review all feedback received and update the draft strategy accordingly, alongside any updates required by the new LTP guidance when this is published, prior to bringing the updated strategy back to the Committee to seek adoption by the Council.

#### **4. Contribution to strategic aims**

- 4.1. The delivery of the Reading Transport Strategy 2040 will help to deliver the three service priorities in the Council's Corporate Plan of Healthy Environment, Thriving Communities and Inclusive Economy as set out in detail in this report.

#### **5. Environmental and climate implications**

- 5.1. The Council declared a Climate Emergency at its meeting on 26 February 2019 (Minute 48 refers). Transport is the biggest greenhouse gas emitting sector in the UK accounting for around 27% of total carbon emissions. As set out in our Climate Emergency Strategy this figure is lower in Reading with transport accounting for around 20% of carbon emissions, however significant investment in sustainable transport solutions is vital in order to respond to the Climate Emergency declared by the Council in February 2019 and to help achieve our target of a carbon neutral Reading by 2030.
- 5.2. The draft transport strategy, which has been developed to align with the Climate Emergency Strategy, responds to this challenge and is focused on five themes. These themes all encourage a step-change in transport infrastructure and services and a shift towards sustainable and clean modes of transport as attractive alternatives to private vehicles. The transport strategy has been developed alongside the Climate Change strategy, particularly the transport theme, to ensure consistency between the two strategies and to ensure the delivery of each strategy supports the overarching objectives of both strategies
- 5.3. 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 draft strategy being focused on encouraging the use of sustainable transport, walking and cycling as attractive alternatives to the private car. This includes managing congestion and therefore reducing carbon emissions 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 assessment also acknowledges that there will be negative impacts resulting from construction activities associated with the delivery of schemes as set out within the strategy.

## **6. Community engagement**

6.1. As set out within the report, the draft strategy is based on substantial public consultation which has been undertaken to inform development of the strategy to date. Initial consultation on the key principles helping to shape the new strategy was undertaken in summer 2019. The consultation resulted in over 3,000 responses, including over 2,800 online and 750 face-to-face discussions at a range of public drop-in sessions, meetings, workshops, etc.

6.2. A selection of the headline feedback received from the consultation is set out below:

- 90% of respondents agreed with the five main themes for the new strategy as set out below:
  - Connecting people and places
  - Supporting healthy lifestyles
  - Creating a clean and green Reading
  - Enabling inclusive growth
  - Embracing smart solutions
- 93% thought making public transport journeys faster and more reliable would be effective;
- 83% said a comprehensive park and ride network would be effective to reduce the number of cars on the road;
- 92% thought better connected walking and cycling routes would be effective and 75% supported the reallocation of road space for sustainable modes of transport;
- 90% said dedicated car free spaces would be effective to increase active travel;
- 78% felt limiting cars from sensitive areas (around schools and the town centre) would improve safety, alongside air quality and health benefits for residents;
- 76% said initiatives where roads are free of cars for a limited time would improve safety, air quality and public health;
- 86% thought better facilities would increase the uptake of zero emission vehicles (e.g. electric vehicle charging points); and
- Around 60% said a charging scheme would be effective in reducing the number of private vehicles on the road.

6.3. In addition, more detailed feedback on the policies and schemes included within the draft strategy was received from the consultation undertaken during summer 2020 and the key themes of feedback have been reflected in the updated draft strategy.

6.4. Further information regarding the feedback received from the public consultations undertaken on the draft strategy to date is available on the Council's website here – [www.reading.gov.uk/transportstrategy](http://www.reading.gov.uk/transportstrategy).

## **7. Equality impact assessment**

7.1. Under the Equality Act 2010, Section 149, a public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act.
  - Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
  - Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
- 7.2. In order to comply with the Equalities Act 2010, an Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA), which incorporates an Equality Impact Assessment, has been undertaken as an integral part of the development of the Reading Transport Strategy 2040. In addition to equality, the IIA also considers the health and environmental implications of the proposed policies, schemes and initiatives contained within the strategy.
- 7.3. The overall vision and key objectives of the strategy relate directly to improving the environment, promoting healthy lifestyles and inclusivity; therefore the benefits resulting from delivery of the strategy in these key areas is reflected in the IIA assessment. This overall focus combined with the IIA approach has ensured that these key areas are fully integrated within the strategy and the positive benefits resulting from delivery of the strategy will be maximised. In addition, the IIA considers that appropriate mitigation measures have been incorporated into the strategy in order to minimise the impact of the proposals.
- 7.4. The draft IIA report will be made public as part of the statutory consultation. In addition, sub-strategies and future schemes and initiatives as outlined in the draft strategy will be subject to further Equality Impact Assessments as they are developed.

## **8. Other relevant considerations**

- 8.1. There are none.

## **9. Legal implications**

- 9.1. The Local Transport Plan is a statutory requirement as set out in the Transport Act 2000, as amended by the Local Transport Act 2008. The Strategic Environmental Assessment, Equality Impact Assessment and Health Impact Assessment, considered in the overarching Integrated Impact Assessment, is also a statutory requirement.
- 9.2. By producing a new transport strategy in line with Government guidance the Council will be fulfilling its statutory duty to keep the strategy under regular review.

## **10. Financial implications**

- 10.1. The development of the draft transport strategy has been funded by existing transport budgets and a revenue grant of £178,571.43 from the DfT which has been provided specifically for the development of LTPs and associated schemes and initiatives.
- 10.2. The development and delivery of schemes as set out in the draft strategy will be subject to future funding being identified and secured, such as grants issued by Central Government and private sector contributions secured through the planning process.

## **11. Timetable for implementation**

- 11.1. The delivery of individual schemes included within the strategy will be subject to future funding being secured.

## **12. Background papers**

- 12.1. There are none.

## **Appendices**

- 1. Reading Transport Strategy 2040 – Draft for Consultation (June 2023)**