

# Traffic Management Sub-Committee

13 September 2023



**Reading**  
Borough Council  
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<b>Title</b>	Petition Update – Private Hire Vehicle Use of Kings Road Bus Lane
<b>Purpose of the report</b>	To make a decision
<b>Report status</b>	Public report
<b>Report author</b>	James Penman, Network Services Manager, Network Services
<b>Lead councillor</b>	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 content of this report.</li><li>2. Consider whether the requested change should proceed to statutory consultation, noting that the officer recommendation is not to proceed with this alteration of access.</li><li>3. Subject to the decision in item 2 above:<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>3.1. Agree that the Assistant Director of Legal and Democratic Services be authorised to undertake a statutory consultation for the proposed alterations in accordance with the Local Authorities Traffic Orders (Procedure) (England and Wales) Regulations 1996.</li><li>3.2. Agree that, subject to no objections being received, the Assistant Director of Legal and Democratic Services be authorised to make the Traffic Regulation Order.</li><li>3.3. Agree that any objection(s) received during the statutory consultation period be reported to a future meeting of the Sub-Committee.</li></ol></li><li>4. Agree that the lead petitioner be informed of the decisions of the Sub-Committee, following publication of the agreed minutes of the meeting.</li><li>5. Agree that no public inquiry be held into the proposals.</li></ol>

## 1. Executive summary

- 1.1. A petition was reported at the September 2022 Sub-Committee meeting (report and minutes available [here](#)), requesting that Reading Borough Council licenced private hire vehicles be granted access to the use of the Kings Road (outbound) bus lane and Duke Street bus gate. The petition contained 187 indications of support.
- 1.2. A petition update report at the November 2022 (report and minutes available [here](#)) recommended that the requested alterations were not pursued at that time and set out the reasons for this. It also recommended that a future strategy be developed for bus lane access holistically and noted that this would likely be reported to Strategic Environment Planning & Transport Committee.
- 1.3. Since the last report, the strategy work is regrettably yet to be resourced and the petitioning private hire association has refined their request to apply only to the Kings Road (outbound) bus lane.

- 1.4. This report sets out the officer recommendations relating to the refined request to enable Reading Borough Council licenced private hire vehicles to use the Kings Road (outbound) bus lane. While the officer recommendation remains against introducing this alteration, the report outlines the process and the changes that would be necessary to achieve the change, should the Sub-Committee wish for the alteration to be pursued.

## 2. Policy context

- 2.1. The recommendations of this report do not lead to changes being introduced.
- 2.2. Previous reporting on this request recommended development of a Boroughwide strategy for bus lane access, notwithstanding any site-specific factors that may additionally influence decisions, and this remains a commitment of officers, once this work can be resourced.
- 2.3. Implementation of the requested access change would be expected to align most closely with the following theme in the Council's Corporate Plan for the years 2022/25:
  - Healthy Environment

While in the context of Reading Borough Council licenced Private Hire vehicles, introducing the alteration should improve the ease of travel for them, this report raises concerns that this could have a detrimental impact on the ease of travel for other users of the bus lane – particularly buses and cyclists – and on road safety. This is of particular concern for pedestrians crossing the road.

## 3. The proposal

### Current Position

- 3.1. As reported to September 2022 Traffic Management Sub-Committee, on 1st July 2022 a petition was submitted to the Council containing 187 indications of support. The petition stated the following:

*Application for usage of the Bus Lane (KINGS ROAD, READING - OUTBOUND) and (DUKE STREET TO ACCESS LONDON STREET, INBOUND/OUTBOUND) READING.*

*I am writing this to request kindly the usage of the following bus lanes as stated above. I myself and likewise most of the PRIVATE HIRE DRIVERS in Reading have been driving Private Hire for many years.*

*Over the years the traffic situation in Reading has got from bad to worse. Day by day it is making our job very difficult and challenging. Especially in the Peak times the roads are so busy that we often get very late in dropping our passengers to their designated destinations.*

*On several occasions taking a V.I.P client to the airport in the mornings/afternoons we always get stranded on the A329 KINGS ROAD OUTBOUND. If we were granted access to use this bus lane it would help us in a logistical way, as you have been very kind to grant us the inbound usage of the same bus lane with barely any complaints of abusive use. As the same goes for the Duke Street bus lane access to London Street inbound/outbound, when we are trying to escort passengers to their destinations, it would be a major help, saving a great amount of time, meeting our customers' demands and needs and most of all reducing the amount of congestion and pollution.*

*Many thanks for taking the time to consider our request.*

- 3.2. Following the September 2022 Sub-Committee meeting, the Lead Petitioner provided further information to the Council, regarding the local challenges that exist for educational establishments recruiting school transport drivers.

In addition to the lengthy application process, it was proposed that potential drivers are finding it unappealing to apply for the limited work that this provides, particularly when these vehicles (in the context of them being private hire vehicles) are having to use

general traffic lanes and contend with the traffic contained therein. It was suggested that allowing private hire access to these bus lanes will contribute to expedited journeys for school transport providers and make this work more appealing, thus improving the level of service.

It was further proposed that many bus lanes in the Borough are being used by Oxfordshire plated vehicles that have been licenced as Hackney Carriages, but are mostly undertaking executive industry work.

- 3.3. The requested bus lane access has since been refined to the Kings Road (outbound) bus lane only.
- 3.4. Officers understand and sympathise with the issues that have been raised through this petition and other correspondence and understand the rationale for the requested alteration to the bus lane restriction. However, there are many factors that need to be considered with such a requested alteration, and a holistic professional recommendation made.
- 3.5. In the November 2022 Sub-Committee report, officers noted that buses play a key role in the efficient movement of people to, from and across the urban Borough. They have been nationally identified as playing an important role in providing a more sustainable transport mode, managing congestion and improving air quality, compared with low-occupancy private vehicle use.

Bus lanes are important facilities in influencing a greater shift toward the use of this cleaner, more efficient transport mode by expediting bus journey times and improving journey time reliability.

Most of Reading's bus lanes additionally provide expedited and lower-trafficked routes that cyclists can use, should they choose to do so. This is not only a sustainable, clean and efficient mode of transport, but also has health benefits through exercise.

- 3.6. Reading Borough Council has been successful in its Government bid for funding its ambitions within the Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP). The proposals include expansion of the bus lane network within Reading, in addition to encouraging greater use of bus services on the existing network, through improvements to bus shelters, bus accessibility and subsidising bus fares, as three examples.
- 3.7. The November 2022 report noted that many of Reading's bus lanes permit access by other vehicle types, such as motorcycles and taxis (including private-hire vehicles). Officers are separately aware of requests for wider access by these vehicle types, particularly within the town centre.

It noted that enabling a wider range of vehicle access to this infrastructure will increase the volumes of traffic using it and will inevitably have an impact on the effectiveness of the facility for its core purpose – expediting bus journey times. This also risks creating barriers to cycling, for those lanes that allow this access, by adding to the level of traffic within these otherwise lighter-trafficked lanes.

Consideration of changes to access along these bus lanes was recommended to form part of a holistic strategy, being considered appropriately and in line with local and national policies and strategies. It was also noted that an additional concern of officers in adding vehicles to the Kings Road outbound bus lane, was an increased risk contributor to casualty incidents along this street - there will be a speed differential against general traffic lanes at busier times and the vehicles will be lower in profile compared to buses and more numerous.

- 3.8. To provide greater context to the officer concerns around risks, Kings Road is sadly experiencing a relatively high number of incidents involving casualties. The majority of these incidents are either involving pedestrians crossing the road or vehicles turning across other vehicles within the bus lanes. Due to the sensitive and personal nature of these incidents, it would not be appropriate nor permissible to provide greater detail in a public report and a public meeting.

The officer concern is that an increase in the volume of traffic in the bus lanes, particularly as this traffic would be a similar profile of vehicles to those within the general traffic lanes, will risk increasing the numbers of casualties. In raising this risk it is important to note that officers are not alleging that it will necessarily be as a result of any inappropriate or unsafe driving that is anticipated by Reading Borough Council's licenced private hire drivers, but as a consequence of increased volumes of traffic that will be travelling at higher speed in comparison with the general traffic lanes.

- 3.9. The Red Route parking restrictions that span from east to west Reading - and include Kings Road – were primarily implemented to improve the reliability of bus services along this corridor, particularly the Reading Buses Number 17 route. The alterations to the Kings Road bus lane were also introduced with this objective, reducing the previous restriction from all private hire vehicles (alongside other permitted vehicle types) to just Reading Borough Council licenced private hires.

With enforcement based on the vehicle type, and not whether the vehicle is occupied with a fare, alongside the apparent lack of a cap on either the number of licenced private hire vehicles or on the access restriction itself, opening bus lanes to private hire vehicles could have a marked difference on traffic volumes using the facility throughout the day.

- 3.10. The November 2022 report recommended that the requested alterations to increase access to the requested bus lanes were not pursued at that time and that a future strategic piece of work be undertaken to consider current and potential alterations to bus lane access across the Borough. These recommendations were agreed by the Sub-Committee.
- 3.11. To pursue the requested alteration of access along the Kings Road outbound bus lane would require the following:
- a) Identify funding
  - b) Statutory consultation – Creation and advertising of the proposed new Traffic Regulation Order
  - c) Implementation decision – Consideration of the consultation feedback
  - d) Signing review - Review and creation of signing specifications for the required changes along the route. This is expected to be eight regulatory blue-backed signs and three large white-backed directional signs that contain elements relating to the access restrictions
  - e) Making the Order – Seal and advertise the made Traffic Regulation Order
  - f) Implementation of the scheme – Change the signing on street, updating exemptions on the enforcement camera software

In the case of a trial, stage 'b' would involve creation and advertising of an Experimental Traffic Regulation Order and stages 'c' and 'e' would follow the implementation at stage 'f'. The old signing would need to be stored for the duration of the trial.

#### Options proposed

- 3.12. As per the agreed action at the November 2022 Sub-Committee meeting, it remains the intension of officers to undertake a strategic review of bus lane access across the borough.
- 3.13. It remains the recommendation of officers that the requested alteration to access along Kings Road outbound bus lane is not agreed, for the reasons raised in the November 2022 report and expanded in this report.

## Other options considered

- 3.14. Should the Sub-Committee decide for officers to proceed with the processes toward delivering the restriction changes, the milestones are outlined in section 3.11 of this report and the legal implications in section 9.

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

- 4.1. The Council's new Corporate Plan has established three themes for the years 2022/25. These themes are:
- Healthy Environment
  - Thriving Communities
  - Inclusive Economy
- 4.2. 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
- 4.3. 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.
- 4.4. In the context of Reading Borough Council licenced Private Hire vehicles, introducing the alteration should improve the ease of travel for them through central to east Reading. However, this report raises concerns that this requested alteration to the bus lane restrictions could have a detrimental impact on the ease of travel for other users of the bus lane – particularly buses and cyclists – and on road safety. This is of particular concern for pedestrians crossing the road.

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

- 5.1. The Council declared a Climate Emergency at its meeting on 26 February 2019 (Minute 48 refers).
- 5.2. The recommendation of this report does not directly deliver changes, so a Climate Impact Assessment has not been considered necessary at this time.
- 5.3. The process of making the requested restriction alterations will result in wastage of old signage and visits to the site to erect/remove consultation notices and implement the changes.

The longer-term impact of introducing the requested alterations is difficult to predict, but would inevitably lead to increased traffic volumes within the bus lane, with potential impact to the reliability and attractiveness of bus use and the attractiveness in using the facility for cycling.

## **6. Community engagement**

- 6.1. The lead petitioner will be informed of the decision of the Sub-Committee, following publication of the meeting minutes.
- 6.2. Any Statutory consultation will be carried out in accordance with the Local Authorities Traffic Orders (Procedure) (England and Wales) Regulations 1996, advertised on street, in the local printed newspapers and on the Council's website (the 'Consultation Hub').

- 6.3. Meeting reports and minutes are published on the Council's website and Traffic Management Sub-Committee is a public meeting that can be attended. Recordings of the meetings are also available via the Council's website ([www.reading.gov.uk](http://www.reading.gov.uk)).

## **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. It is not considered that an Equality Impact Assessment is relevant at this time as the report recommendation does not directly lead to any physical change. Assessment will be considered should the Sub-Committee agree to pursue the change of access to the bus lane. Furthermore, the processes involved in developing the change will require statutory public consultation, which will provide an opportunity for feedback to be provided and considered by the Council, ahead of an implementation (or otherwise) decision.

## **8. Other relevant considerations**

- 8.1. None expected from the recommendations of this report. However, the following considerations have been made, or will apply should the Sub-Committee not agree with the officer recommendations:
- a) Procedural Requirements – Covered in section 3.11 of this report.
  - b) Regulatory Duties – Covered in sections 3.11 and 9 of this report.
  - c) Road Safety – Covered in sections 3.7 and 3.8 of this report.

## **9. Legal implications**

- 9.1. There are no foreseen legal implications relating to the recommendation of this report.
- 9.2. Should the Sub-Committee not agree with the officer recommendations and wish to proceed with development of the requested changes, the following will apply:
- a) The draft Traffic Regulation Order will be created under the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 and advertised in accordance with the Local Authorities Traffic Orders (Procedure) (England and Wales) Regulations 1996. The consultation period must be a minimum of 21 days.
  - b) The resultant Traffic Regulation Order will be made under the same regulations, subject to the implementation (or otherwise) decision for the scheme.
  - c) Following the making of this Order, the public must be afforded a period of six weeks to raise any legal challenge, prior to the implementation of any elements contained within.
  - d) Agreement will be required for the Assistant Director of Legal and Democratic Services to undertake these processes, if applicable.

## **10. Financial implications**

- 10.1. None arising from the recommendation of this report.
- 10.2. Should the Sub-Committee not agree with the officer recommendations and wish to proceed with development of the requested changes, funding will need to be identified.

This funding will need to cover the costs of advertising the draft Traffic Regulation Order, the 'made' Order and for the signing alterations, as applicable.

**11. Timetable for implementation**

11.1. Not applicable.

**12. Background papers**

12.1. There are none.